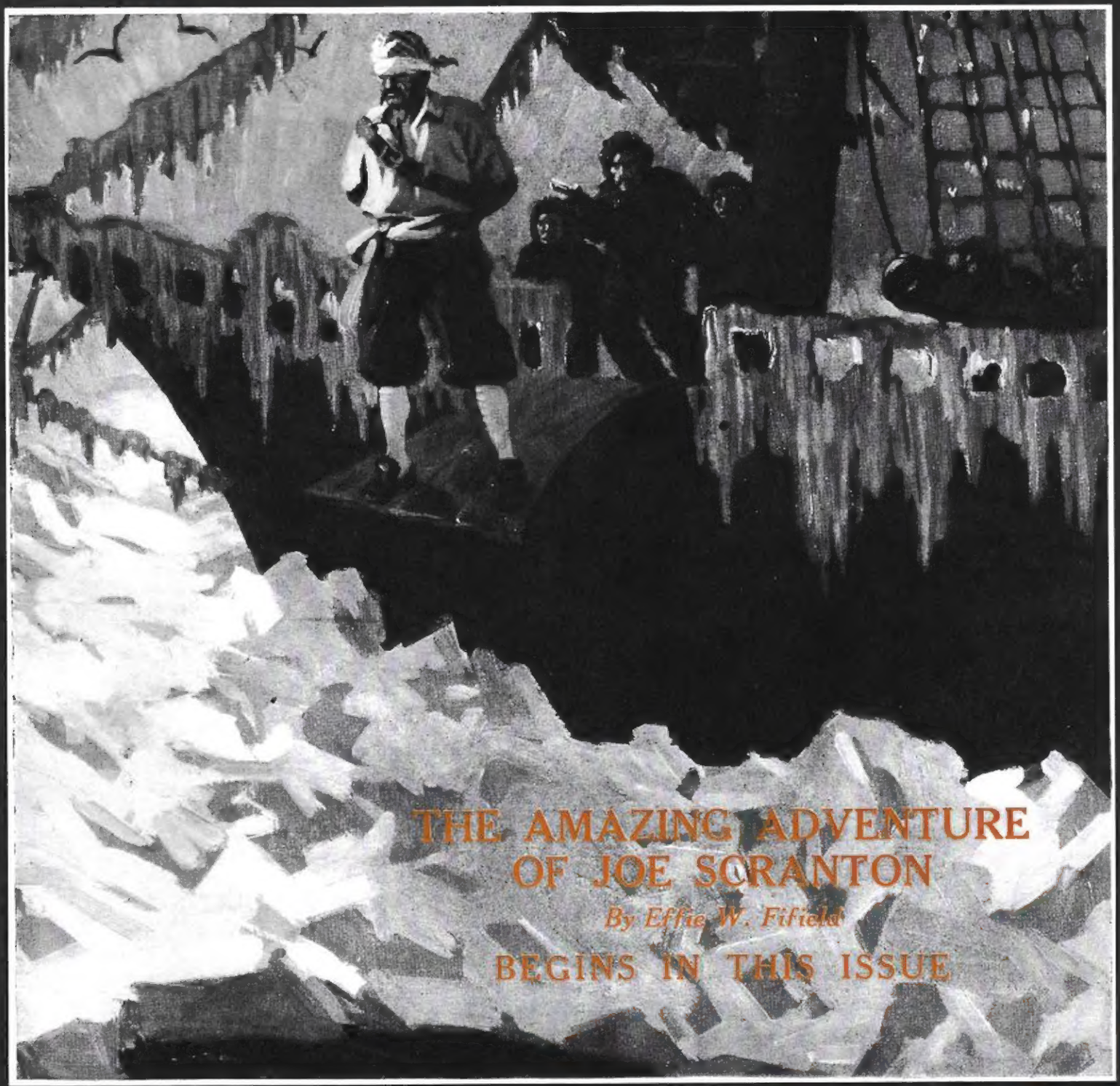
Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE



THE AMAZING ADVENTURE OF JOE SCRANTON

By Effie W. Fifield

BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE

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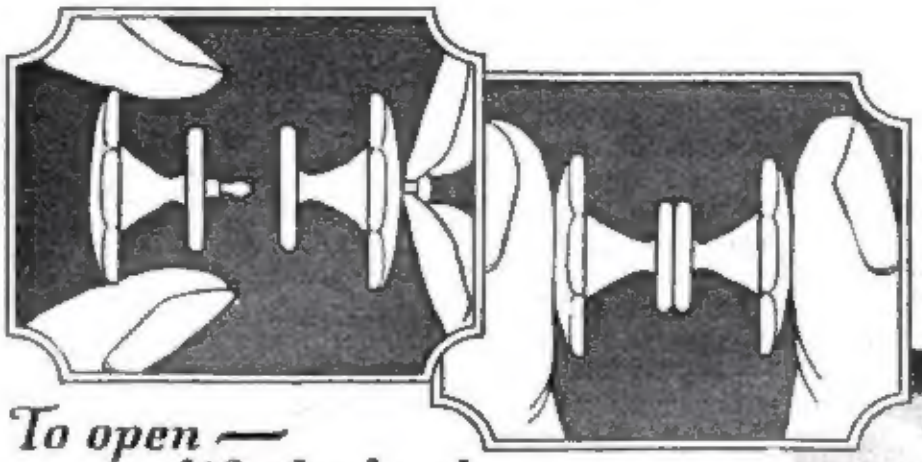

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Stays locked

To open — lift the knob

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By J. E. Greenslade

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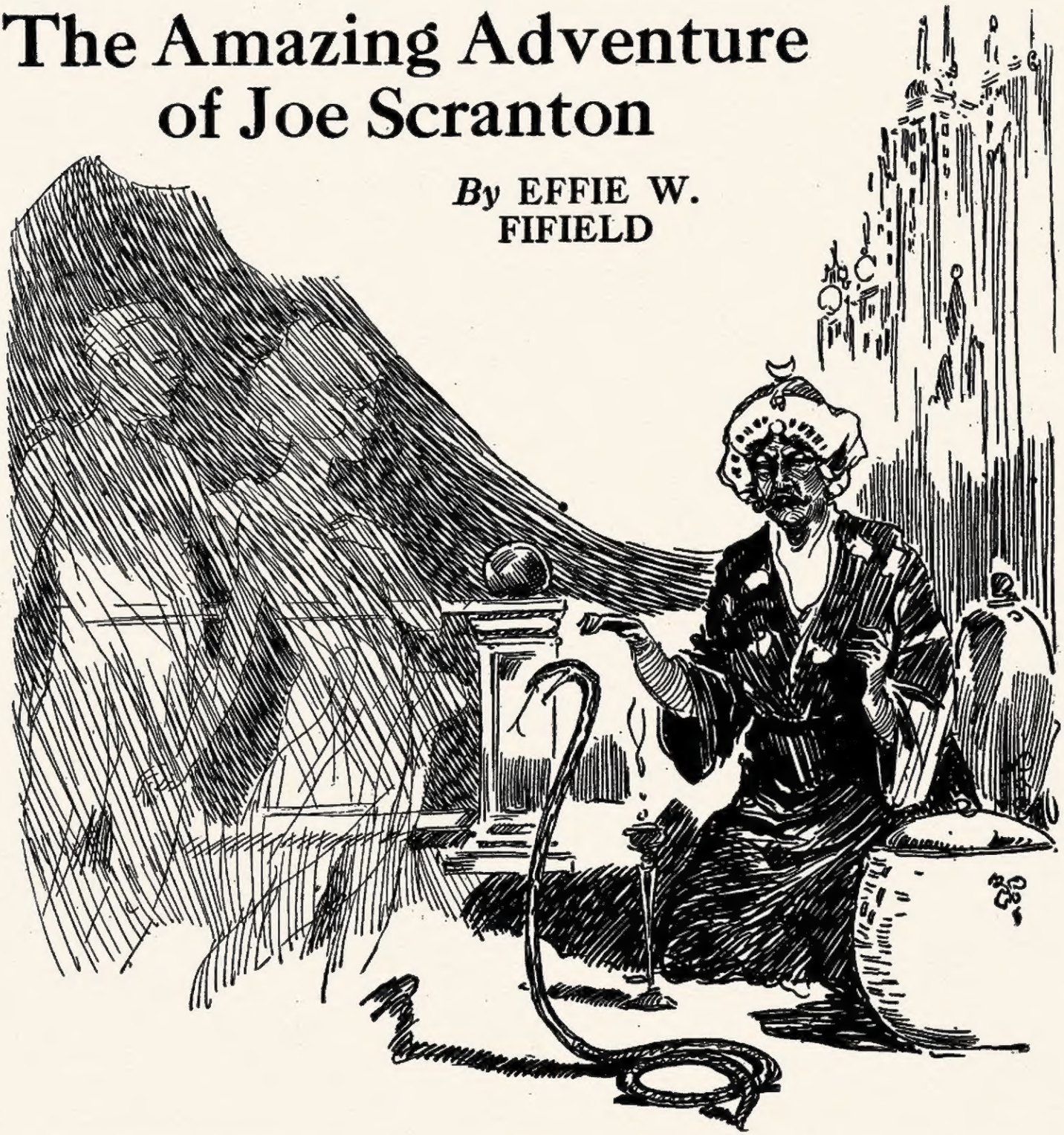
The Amazing Adventure of Joe Scranton

By EFFIE W. FIFIELD



TOD STORRS introduced me to Hicks Carew. I wonder if everyone who has met that man remembers the introduction as one of the calamities of his career. For my part, I never think of the name, Hicks Carew, without putting *damn* before it. Damn Hicks Carew! Believe me, that petition comes from the heart.

"Why, Hicks Carew!" exclaimed my friend; "this is a surprise. I heard you were in India."

"Lately returned," replied Hicks Carew briefly.

One of the peculiarities about the man was, and is, that he is usually called his whole name—Hicks Carew—just like that. I had heard a great deal about him, but this was the first time I had seen him.

"I want you to meet my friend, Joe Scranton," sad Tod, pulling me forward. "Joe," he continued, "you've heard of Hicks Carew, the greatest psychic scientist living."

"Yes—Oh, yes!" I exclaimed, simulating reverential joy, and wishing I

knew exactly what a psychic scientist was.

I fancied a flicker of sardonic humor danced in the scientist's eyes, as I spoke, but he acknowledged the introduction with weary indifference, not troubling himself to leave the lounging chair in order to greet me. I studied him while Tod tried to engage him in conversation —a tall dark man, well formed, very handsome, very self-possessed — not thirty years of age, if one could judge by his appearance. How could he have found time to be the greatest psychic scientist living? Didn't that require study, research, experience, long hours of steady application?

We had met on the wide porch of a summer hotel, and Tod's roving eye soon spied a pretty girl. It was inevitable.

"Excuse me just a minute, Joe," he said; "I see a friend—be back in no time —you wait here."

I was left alone with Hicks Carew, and I couldn't think of a single good reason for running away.

"I am convinced," said Hicks Carew, lazily, "that it is not possible to eat constantly of one's favorite dish—to inhale the fragrance of one's favorite flower—to read one's favorite author, or hear one's favorite opera — without longing for a change."

"I quite agree with you," I replied, as if I had given that subject much profound study.

"There would be less domestic unhappiness," continued Hicks Carew, "if others had given that axiom the attention that you seem to have accorded it."

I could see, now, that the man was driving at something—something that had to do with me. He was not talking just to make conversation as I had as first supposed. Not knowing what to say, I decided to look very thoughtful and wise—and say nothing.

"It is not that you have grown tired of your wife," was his next amazing remark. He was studying me very much as I should imagine a bugologist would study a new insect.

"Indeed I have not," I replied warmly.

"You love her, and believe that she adores you."

"I know it. We have loved each other ever since we were kiddies."

"That's it!" Hicks Carew nodded vigorously. "As I said a moment ago, one can't eat of one's favorite dish at every meal—"

"Sir," I interrupted, indignantly, "I would have you understand—"

"Please be seated again," replied Hicks Carew; "let me assure you that I understand—everything. It is not that you wish to see less of Angeline, your wife—but that you'd like to see a little more of Helen, the wife of Colonel Saunders."

Now I was angry—angry as the devil. What did the man mean! By what right —Why, I ought to compel him to fight. Many a duel has been fought for less reason. I stuttered in my just indignation. I rose to leave him. How I wish I *had* left him! But he was looking at me so curiously—just as if he were reading my very thoughts—and perhaps he had heard gossip that might hurt the two best women in the world—my wife and Helen. I could not leave without knowing just what that fiend was driving at.

"Colonel Saunders and I were graduated together," I said, with dignity—as if that made all the difference. "We have always been chums."

"Angeline and Helen were school mates, also, were they not?"

"If you are speaking of my wife, Mrs. Scranton, and her best friend, Mrs. Saunders," I replied severely, "I may reply that they have been best friends from babyhood."

"I have been told that you and your wife are an ideal couple," he said, "and that Colonel and Mrs. Saunders are another."

"You have been correctly informed," I replied coldly; "but for the life of me I can't see why perfect strangers think they have a right to comment upon us in any way."

"The ordinary stranger wouldn't think of doing so," replied Hicks Carew, calmly; "but a scientist doesn't always believe all he is told just because it happens to sound very romantic and pretty. And this is especially true of a scientist who reads the human mind."

"Of course," I said as stiffly as I could manage it, "you will believe what you please."

"There are times," soliloquized Hicks Carew, "when even I can sympathize with the poor fly struggling in a dish of maple syrup."

"I will bid you good morning," I said coldly.

"Not yet," and he bent a look upon me out of eyes that had become startlingly dark. They were filled with a dancing radiance, yet they never wavered in their expression. They fascinated me—and I resumed my seat.

"We'll be friends, yet," he said, smiling—and in spite of my uneasiness I had to admit that his smile was very winning. "I wish to tell you," he continued, "that I consider the friendship between you and Mrs. Saunders most delightful—as nearly platonic as friendship can be. And I am the more greatly impressed because it is difficult to find such friendship between two happily married people, neither of whom would willingly cause their respective partners one moment of sorrow or anxiety."

That sounded just a little sarcastic; yet the man seemed to be speaking in good faith, and his remarkable eyes were now large and brown and soft—like those of an intelligent dog when regarding a loved master. I couldn't find any real ground for resentment.

"Mrs. Saunders and I are good friends," I replied, "but there's nothing unusual—"

"Not a thing," interrupted Hicks Carew. "I understand. Your wife and Colonel Saunders approve of the friendship, although they can't always get up any real interest in the topics that interest you. They do not have literary tastes —but they try to understand—"

"That's just the trouble," I burst out, quite forgetting that I had decided not to admit everything. "They listen, not because they are interested, but because each is eager that his particular property shall say something that is quite unanswerable."

"And so you each try to be a little brighter than the other, and your conversation loses much of its charm—is, in fact, far less interesting than when you have a few minutes alone together."

"It is sometimes trying," I confessed, "to be obliged to descend from the delectable heights of fascinating speculation—"

I hesitated. How could I say what was in my mind in a way that would not sound—in a way that I would not be ashamed to recall?

"I understand," replied Hicks Carew, with an air of the most charming sympathy, "I understand what one suffers who is compelled to descend just to address some commonplace remark to a wedded companion in order to forestall any suspicion of neglect. That annoyance grows upon one."

Again he sounded vaguely sarcastic, but looked very friendly and sympathetic.

"Your friendship is too ideal," he said, "to be spoiled. You should be safe from interruption during such periods as it seems good and proper to be together."

"We shall never court offensive attentions from Dame Gossip," I replied, in my most moral manner.

"And you don't want to hurt either Angeline or the Colonel," added Hicks Carew. "Now I could help you—but it would not be well to mention me to either one of them. They would not understand. If your wife knew me, she would probably speak of me as an interesting

fakir, and Colonel Saunders would affirm once more that occultism is poppycock."

"Have you heard him?" I asked, laughing, for he had mimicked the Colonel to the letter.

"I know," said Hicks Carew, "that they could never comprehend the simplest law of the psychic world—while you and Helen would soon be brought to revel in it."

"Just what," I asked, drawing my chair closer, and speaking in an undertone, "just what would you propose?"

"Simply that you and Helen astralize yourselves."

I stared—too astonished to speak.

"As astrals," he continued, "you can enjoy each other's companionship uninterrupted by the commonplace. An astral can go where it will—and Dame Gossip cannot follow."

"But how do we know about it? Does it take long to learn? Is it painful? I've read about it—but never with attention."

"No, because you did not know how useful it might be. Think of visiting all the beautiful places of the world—just you two."

"But would we know we were ourselves? Would we know each other—what it meant to be together?"

"Most certainly. There's nothing about it to divide friends who are truly platonic."

"As Helen and I are," I hastened to add. "Think of standing on the summit of the highest mountain," I raved, "Helen and I—drinking in the beauties around us—and no one to spoil everything by asking how high the mountain is—in feet and inches. Think of being able to bathe in the rays of the setting sun, with no one there to ask us if those clouds do not look like rain."

"It is even as I thought," murmured Hicks Carew, with a look that made me feel quite proud of myself.

"And no one can accuse us of anything improper," I added, virtuously.

"Of course not," replied Hicks Carew, "there will *be* nothing improper."

"You will teach us?"

"If you wish. Better talk it over with Mrs. Saunders, and meet me here this evening — about eleven. Bring Mrs. Saunders. It will be dark out here, and the others will be dancing."

Helen and I were there at the appointed time. So was Hicks Carew.

"We are interested," began Helen, "but not convinced—"

"I think I might be able to convince even Colonel Saunders that what I propose is possible," said Hicks Carew.

"If you please," said Helen, "we won't mention it to him at this time."

"It would not do at all," I added. "Should we two endeavor to secure undisturbed companionship both her husband and my wife would be hurt."

"They could not understand," said Helen, "how it is possible for us to love them better than anyone else, and still wish to be away from them—alone together—occasionally."

"Well," I asked, "shall we try it?"

"I can't see that it would do any harm," she replied.

"It should be at night, I suppose, when Angeline and the Colonel are both asleep," I said. "It would be awkward if they tried to arouse us—"

"At what hour does your husband retire?" asked Hicks Carew.

"At eleven. He is usually fast asleep by twelve."

"And Angeline?"

"Oh, I think she's not likely to give us any trouble after that hour."

"Come to my office, both of you—at once!" commanded Hicks Carew. "I'll introduce you to some of the mysteries of the occult."

CHAPTER TWO

HELEN and I accompanied Hicks Carew to his office, as he had commanded, and it was nearly midnight when we arrived there.

Were we frightened? Yes, and no. We realized that we had decided to take on experiences not at all common to the part of the world in which we lived—ghostly experiences—and we shuddered a little and were naturally more or less apprehensive.

Had I known what I was soon to find out, I should have refused to enter his room; I should have dragged Helen away from his door; I should have killed Hicks Carew then and there had he insisted upon our obedience against my better judgment.

I am now of the opinion that Hicks Carew must have cast some sort of spell over us, leaving us not quite responsible for what we did. For, at the time, it seemed to us we were doing a very natural thing in going with him to learn how to astralize ourselves. And we really were convinced that we were acting on our own initiative, and that this man, almost a stranger, had become our benefactor. I can't believe we should ever have thought so, had we not been partially hypnotized.

Helen and I visited that office on more than one occasion—just how many I shall not tell; nor shall I tell of the lessons we learned, because it is a fact that nine out of every ten people can learn the art of astralization if they really apply themselves. And some, after reading this, might be tempted to make the experiment. I do not want to be responsible for anything of the sort.

Such practices do not lead to the sane development of the world; they are opposed to the practical advancement of the peoples of the world. Think of India! Many of her people know all about the art that Hicks Carew taught us; would we like to have our country grow to be like India? Very well, then! Don't ask for further enlightenment along this line, and don't assume that I couldn't teach you to astralize yourself because I am refusing to do so.

I will simply say that Helen and I were apt pupils. We practiced faithfully, not even neglecting the tiresome breathing exercises. But even the best of pupils could not have progressed as rapidly as we did without Hicks Carew to help over the hard places. It requires a long time, and infinite patience, as a rule, to become an adept at astralization—and it is exceedingly dangerous. Many a pupil has succeeded in leaving the body only to discover that they could not return, and the doctors were forced to guess at the cause of death of which they had not the slightest knowledge.

One night, when there was not the least doubt that Angeline slept, I turned on my right side, straightened my limbs, threw back my head until my spine was perfectly straight, closed my eyes, and—the rest has been deleted.

I was successful in this, my first attempt, as I had felt confident that I should be. No one, who has not experienced it, can tell what a delicious sense of freedom comes with the laying aside of the body. All know how relieved one feels after divesting himself of cumbersome clothing, and they who can fancy that feeling intensified a million times may have some idea of the rapture that filled my soul as I stood beside my bed and looked down on my body, to all appearances wrapped in the deep sleep of perfect health.

I made my way to Helen's door, and to my great joy learned that her efforts, also, had been crowned with success. Then I felt embarrassment, for there she stood, clothed only in her nightgown! She seemed to read my thought, for she exclaimed:

"But you are in your pajamas!"

"What difference does it make?" I asked quite recklessly.

"None at all. Where shall we go?"

"Let's make it Italy."

"Oh, yes, Italy!" Helen clapped her hands in ecstasy.

How can I describe that trip! Why try to do the impossible? Suffice it to say that we had only one source of regret; the speed with which we darted through the air prevented our seeing many of the beauties over and through which we passed. We had not learned how to govern our speed, and were traveling almost as fast as thought.

Once we heard a faint humming noise far ahead of us; and almost as soon as we had spoken of it we found ourselves sailing directly over a huge airplane that was making a no-stop journey across the continent, at a speed of four hundred miles an hour.

"What was that?" we heard a startled voice exclaim.

"Looked like two spirits traveling side by side," was the reply, in a tone of tremendous excitement bordering on fear.

"Nonsense! There are no spirits!"

We had now passed so far beyond the airplane that even the *purr* of the engine was nearly lost to us—yet the airplane was traveling in our direction. Does that give you any idea what it means to travel almost as fast as you think?

Helen and I were for most part quite unconscious of all save the near presence of each other, and the enveloping cloud of soft gray mist that seemed to accompany us. We said little. We were too happy for words. No one who has not experienced the entrancing joy of platonic friendship can understand what that first trip through the moon-drenched ether meant to us.

All too soon we found ourselves seated side by side on the shore of a beautiful body of water. The exquisite rapture of that moment can never be put into words. We were free with a freedom that a soul bound to an unresponsive body can never comprehend. We were permeated by an elation, an exaltation beyond the clumsy devices by which humanity attempts to make itself understood. We were experiencing what was never meant to be described—just lived. We now appreciated the beauties of nature as we had never done when we saw them through the eyes of the body; now even the humblest weed had charms that we had never before dreamed it possessed.

No words passed between us. We had no need of words, for each read the other's thought, and thus in blissful silence our souls communed together, undisturbed by the cares of our everyday existence.

"To think!" exclaimed Helen, at last, "that we are here—you and I together!"

"You and I—alone," I amended softly.

"And in Italy!" added Helen, rapturously. "Italy—dear old Italy! And the wonderful shores of Lake Como—why I never dreamed how wonderful—"

"Hold on!" I interrupted, forgetting my native politeness in a wave of excitement.

"The moon beams dance upon the waves," mused Helen; "it is almost as light as day—"

"Look!" I exclaimed—"over there! Now what do you think of that!"

"Islands!" exclaimed Helen. "Do I see islands?"

"Look where I'm pointing! Turn your head a little to the right. There!"

"What is it—a tower?"

"We are looking at the waters of the Mediterranean sea," I explained—"not Lake Como at all."

"How do you know?"

"That tower, as you call it, is one of the Pillars of Hercules. We are on the extreme southern point of the Iberian Peninsula. In ten minutes we could cross over to Africa—"

"Africa!" exclaimed Helen, quite startled. "What a long way from home! We must go back."

"In a minute. See the surf dancing against the rocks out there! Makes me think of Angeline, when she first saw the Pacific Ocean after a storm. 'My stars,' she said, 'just see the suds!' "

We both laughed.

"I am reminded," said Helen, "of a trip through the Yellowstone with my husband. We were standing at the foot of the great falls. 'It makes me sick,' groaned my husband, 'to see all that power going to waste.' "

Again we laughed. Not critically, but tenderly. We really enjoyed these traits in our domestic companions—when they did not disturb our own reveries. We laughed, and thought of home.

With one accord we rose. It seemed as if at the same moment we had both realized that we had ties which bound us to earth.

I submit the above statement in proof that our affection for the partners of our life was every bit as consistent as any reasonable person could ask. If Helen had not loved Colonel Saunders—if I had not loved Angeline—could we have sacrificed our present bliss to return to them?

We immediately started on our return trip. I left Helen at her door perhaps a half hour later. I waited until she had disappeared through it (she had no need to go to the trouble of opening it) and then betook myself to my own room.

My body was just as I had left it, except that it had grown quite cold, and Angeline, half awake, was peevishly asking why I had not warmed my feet before coming to bed. I smiled, thinking how surprised she would be, should she awake enough to realize that it was four o'clock in the morning.

It was with considerable effort, and not without pain, that I finally took possession of my body, and before I closed my eyes in sleep, I resolved that I would not again remain away so long a time, unless I could find some way to keep my body warm during my absence.

Our experiment had been so entirely delightful, that it is not surprising that Helen and I resolved to repeat it at an early date. We were rejoiced beyond measure on the next day to find that we could recall all our experiences, and we had great difficulty in keeping ourselves from referring to them, when conversing together in the presence of Angeline and Colonel Saunders. But even that difficulty served to add spice to an existence that we had found monotonous, and to draw us closer in the bonds of a friendship that, in our own opinion, was more platonic than anything ever conceived by Plato.

In less than a week we started on our second trip through the atmosphere. A stiff gale was blowing, which we found far from comfortable, and we decided to rise above it, and, hundreds of miles from the surface of the earth, look for a place where our souls could commune together in a state of bliss unbroken by annoying conditions of any sort.

As we had no means of measuring time or distance, I cannot say how long we had traveled when we became aware of voices in our immediate vicinity.

"We are not alone," said Helen, floating closer to me.

"Can Angeline and Colonel Saunders be following us?" I asked, a sudden fear assailing me.

"Impossible! They would never be able to astralize themselves."

"Oh, to be sure!" I replied, in a tone of the deepest assurance. But I was not quite at rest in the matter. Experience had taught me that, on several occasions, Angeline had proved herself to be possessed of characteristics which I had never suspected, and there was no telling what she might do, should her suspicions become aroused. She might even become an astral. She might teach Colonel Saunders how to become one.

"He'd never do that!" exclaimed Helen quite positively. "Of course, I don't know about Angeline—"

"Neither do I," I sighed—"but if she chanced to be in love with him—"

"Angeline in love with my husband!"

"Or if he were in love with her—"

"Impossible!"

"It has quite suddenly occurred to me that we've left them alone together rather frequently—"

"The very thought makes me electric with apprehension—" exclaimed Helen.

"Don't let's worry. Theirs may be simply a platonic affection—like ours—"

"It couldn't be. My husband isn't capable of entertaining platonic affections."

"Nor Angeline—when I come to think of it. In fact, I am sure you and I are in a class by ourselves."

At that moment, we found ourselves in a large company of people, most of whom were too deeply engaged in their own affairs to know or care that two newcomers had joined them. A glance was sufficient to tell that they were from every country in the world.

It seemed to me as if I could hear their voices, and could even recognize the tones of some of them, but of this I can not be sure. My books on the subject of astralization had led me to believe that an astral had no need of voice, since he always converses by means of telepathy. If that is a fact, I can add one item to the sum of human knowledge on that subject, which is, that the effect of the tones of the voice are also conveyed telepathically. I am confident that I heard the voices of some of those new acquaintances.

What struck me as still more remarkable was that I could understand what every one of them said, although, at the same time, I was fully aware that many spoke in a language which I had never learned. I glanced at Helen and saw that she was passing through the same sort of experience, and that she was no less astonished than I.

"Where are we?" I asked of a man who stood near me, surveying the crowd with the far-reaching look of a philosopher.

He was evidently a native of Thibet, and you may imagine my surprise when he replied by speaking one word which I cannot reproduce here, but which I at once knew signified a sort of clearing house, where they who are divorced or unhappily married may meet to settle or arrange their matrimonial difficulties.

"Yes," I repeated, "a matrimonial clearing house—but where?"

"We are on top of the great Pyramid—"

"One of the three pyramids of Gizeh," I exclaimed.

"The highest one," he replied; "it is nearly five hundred feet high."

"And we got here without climbing," said Helen, comfortably.

We had read that there was room for only some half dozen people to stand on top of that pyramid—then looked at the assembled company, and for the first time realized how little room an astral requires.

"A matrimonial clearing house," I repeated, and looked more closely at my informant.

Why was he here? In what way could such a convention interest him? What could a native of Thibet know of the burden civilization had bound upon the back of matrimony? I had read that in no country on earth was the marriage relation held in greater contempt than it was in Thibet. If this man were not satisfied with his spouse, why did he not get another? I asked the Thibetan why he was in such a place as this.

"My friend," he replied, "I have learned that you have a joy which we do not know. I am here to try to comprehend it, that I may return to my body, and teach it to my fellows."

"Judging by the countenances of those whom we see around us," I said, "you have come to a poor place to study joy. What is the sensation to which you refer?"

"In part, that which you now experience," he said, looking me full in the eyes with an expression that I did not like.

"I do not understand you," I said, coldly, moving away from him.

"Wait," he implored, keeping close beside me, "why have you and this lady astralized yourselves? Is it not that you may enjoy each other's society without causing any disreputable comment? Well, in my country there would be no talk, and none of the consequent pleasure found in outwitting the talkers. You enjoy a mental exhilaration in running away with another man's wife that I can never experience, unless I can first succeed in convincing my countrymen that such things are wrong."

"You misunderstand us entirely," began Helen coldly, when she was interrupted by a gesture of despair from our strange acquaintance.

"I know I do!" he exclaimed; "but I am trying to understand. If I could only experience the feeling that caused that remark—'you misunderstand us entirely!' They all say it! Everyone says it of himself, and no one believes it of his neighbor, and it seems such a necessary part of the enjoyment! Oh, if I could only comprehend it! You have moral laws made by yourselves which you do not obey, but which you seem to wish others to think you obey. If I could catch and comprehend the spirit that prompts obedience and disobedience in the same breath, my problem would be solved. Then I could have the honor of giving to my countrymen a new form of gratification. Then we in Thibet would have marriages and divorces and elopements and scandals and murders, and life would forever cease to be monotonous."

"See here, sir," said I, thoroughly nettled, "I want you to understand that we are not of these people—"

"That's it!" he interrupted, "everyone here has told me precisely the same thing about himself. I have listened to explanation after explanation, but I can see no very great difference. I have reached the conclusion that self-delusion must be a part of the enjoyment; but why? And is it a real delusion? Can't you see that no one believes of you what you believe of yourself, and what you would not believe of another in the same conditions? If it is a real delusion, how do you acquire it? If it is not, what pleasure do you find in it? I should be very glad of a little practical help out of this difficulty."

Helen and I were disgusted. We turned abruptly and left our obtuse acquaintance. Time was too precious to be wasted on an individual who would not accept us at our own valuation. But we had, for some reason, lost all inclination for each other's society, and made our way homeward at once, arriving two hours earlier than we had done on our previous trip.

How rejoiced I was to find Angeline sleeping as sweetly as when I had left her! I touched her feet and hands and brow. They were warm and slightly moist, like those of a sleeping baby. I knew she had not astralized herself, for she could not so quickly have warmed her body.

Several days elapsed before Helen and I repeated our experiment. They were days passed in the simple delights of home life. We did not see each other. She was content with Colonel Saunders and I with Angeline. But one evening we chanced to meet at the house of a friend, and the conversation turned upon a new club that had lately been formed for the purpose of attempting to apply scientific principles to occult studies.

Helen was brilliant that evening, and I flatter myself that my conversation was not found uninteresting. It was a pleasure to us both to know what a wealth of experience we might reveal if it were only advisable! We looked at each other and smiled, and without a word having been spoken I knew that Helen would astralize herself that night, and that I should meet her as before.

From that moment we became almost reckless, indulging in the delights of astralization sometimes as often as two or

three times in one week. I wonder, now, that our companions in wedlock remained unsuspicious as long as they did.

It was through my own stupidity that Angeline first began to suspect that all was not right with me. I was so eager to astralize myself that I did not always wait until she was too sleepy to talk. I know, now, that she asked questions which I did not hear, and that she became vexed because I did not reply, and that her vexation finally led to a belief that I no longer loved her. If I could only have guessed the state of her mind! Why can't a wife tell her husband exactly *what* she is thinking? It would save many an unpleasant experience—that is, if she became confidential before her thoughts became suspicious, and her temper soured.

CHAPTER THREE

I HAVE already touched upon the unpleasant sensations coincident with the resumption of the body, after long hours spent in flying about the universe.

By the way, I call it "flying"—but it is not really flying because our astrals have no wings. We do not fly, nor do we walk. Even astral limbs could not move fast enough to get us through the atmosphere as fast as we go.

As nearly as I can explain it, it is like pushing ourselves along at a tremendous speed—something as children "work themselves up" in a swing—although we have nothing for feet or hands to push against. We simply make use of the power within us. We want to go—and we just go, and there are no obstacles to prevent our going as fast as we desire.

I sat in one of our pretty parks, one evening, thinking about it, when Hicks Carew quietly seated himself beside me.

"I think," he began, without preliminary greeting, "that your body becomes cold, stiff, and unwieldy much more quickly than Helen's does."

"I have never heard her complain," I replied, trying to act as unconcerned as if we had been sitting together discussing this very subject for some time. I was becoming accustomed to his unusual manners.

"It may be in part because she is naturally a little more heroic," he continued, "although I really think she does not suffer as you do."

"I do find it a good deal of an ordeal," I admitted, "like climbing into a stiff gown of frozen tallow! Sometimes, when I think of it I am so filled with revulsion—"

"Revulsion? Don't say that! It can't be revulsion or anything like it. Think what a wonderful experience you are having! And really, you know, you are not obliged to suffer—nor anything at all."

"What could I do to prevent it?"

"Simply keep your body warm."

"But I don't know how."

"Arrange with some other astral to occupy it during your absence."

"How easy!" I exclaimed. "Queer that I never thought of that myself."

"Be sure to engage one that is your size," warned Hicks Carew, as I left him, after thanking him warmly for his suggestion.

That very night I met a wandering astral and engaged him in conversation. He looked to be exactly my size, and I was confident that he'd fit into my body very comfortably.

"Why, yes," he replied, after hearing my proposition, "I can do it."

"But how about your body?" I suddenly thought to inquire.

"Oh, my old shell is used to being vacated; besides, it warms up quickly—and I don't mind a little discomfort."

With that, I showed him into my body, and then started with Helen on a trip to India that we had been planning for some time. We had now learned how to decide where we wished to go, and how to keep our objective point clearly in mind so that we could land where we planned to land, and not enthuse over the beauties of Lake Como when we were looking at the Mediterranean Sea—as happened on our first.

We had spent several days laying out this trip, and deciding how much we could see in a given time. I proposed that we give this entire trip to a study of India's wonderful temples; but to my surprise Helen would not agree to that.

"Let's have a little fun, first," she pleaded; "we can do the temples next time."

"Very well," I agreed. "Where do you want to go?"

"Calcutta," she responded promptly.

"But what form of amusement do you think we can find in Calcutta?"

"First, we'll visit Jain Temple—"

"I thought temples were taboo on this trip."

"Not Jain Temple. You know that's the wealthiest place of worship in India. It is where they teach the transmigration of souls, and not far from there, right on the street, we'll find the snake charmers."

"Snakes!" I exclaimed with a shudder; "I loathe them."

"But you won't mind them at all, in the astral. They can't bite an astral, and it must be horribly fascinating to watch the showmen handling the big pythons—making them dance, winding them about their bodies—Heavens! I only hope I don't scream."

"But why look if it makes you feel like screaming?"

"Can't you understand? It's awful fascination—the horrible thrill—why, it is something one wouldn't forget in a life time."

"And you call that fun!"

"Not fun, exactly, but diversion. Tell me, why do you go to a play—isn't it to get your emotions all stirred up? Would you really care for a story that didn't make you cry? Well, then! Do you know, there's a Bengal tiger in Calcutta that ate two hundred men before he was captured? I want to see him. I wonder what they feed him now."

"I hope he doesn't reach out for me," I said.

"And," she continued, paying no attention to my interruption, "we must be sure to see some of the Hindu devotees doing penance on a bed of spikes. I'd like to see for myself just how sharp those spikes are."

It was a glimpse into Helen's mind for which I was totally unprepared. I must confess that it did not please me; but I tried to excuse it on the ground that all women were like that.

We went to Calcutta. The Jain Temple pleased me immensely—the most wonderful building I had ever seen. Every square foot of it is magnificently decorated as if it were a jewel box intended for a king's jewels. In ten years of careful study one could not exhaust the beauties of this temple.

I saw the snake-charmers, but refused to study the poor deluded devotees stretched, naked, on their beds of spikes. Instead, I went down to Howrah Bridge, which crosses the Hoogly River, and watched the many ships from nearly all over the world, and dreamed dreams about them, and was happy. I even caught myself wondering why I had gone into this thing with a woman, and thinking what a perfectly ripping time I could be having if Tod Storrs were with me, instead of Helen. I shouldn't wonder if all women would lose their charm to a considerable extent if one were to know their astrals really well.

Helen found me on the Howrah Bridge, as per agreement.

"Time to go," she said brightly. "I've had such a good time! I'll tell you all about it, on the way."

She was bright and chatty, and did not seem to notice my abstraction. I was not only disenchanted, but I began for the first time to make companions of quite a different nature from those I had been entertaining. She might not have admired the Jain Temple as I did; but

she would have wished to stay within its cool interior for a long time, and her face would have worn its expression of peace and serenity that I have always found soothing, and she would have said, quite simply: "I liked it in there. It made me feel so close to the dear Heavenly Father."

I had returned at the very hour upon which we had agreed—my tenant and I. My body was delightfully warm, and sleeping soundly. I aroused it by stretching myself across it and causing a cold wave of air to pass into one ear.

When my astral friend peeped out, I intimated to him that I was now ready to relieve him. He crept part way out, leaned his astral elbows on my physical head, and, to my astonishment and supreme indignation, refused to be relieved. Deliberately, fiendishly and decidedly, refused to be relieved.

"Go, get into my body," he said. "I have told you where I left it."

"But I don't want your body."

"So? Well, I *do* want yours. It is built with a more prepossessing face than mine."

It was in vain that I pleaded with him. He had possession of my body, and I could not get him out. He would not even listen to my entreaties, but darted back in, knowing full well that an astral has no means of communication with ordinary humanity. Again and again I sent cold air into his, or rather my own, ears, hoping once more to provoke him into showing himself; but he deliberately rose, found a box of cotton that I kept on my dressing-table and stuffed both ears so full that not a breath of air could reach him. Then he returned to bed, and was soon in a deep sleep.

What could I do? Was ever any other man in a fix like that!

I cursed Hicks Carew with all the vehemence at my command—then I went in search of him, entered his room, and sent an icy blast into his ear. His astral peered out.

I started to tell him of my dilemma, but he seemed to know all about it—and he did not appear at all concerned.

"Go get into that other body," he growled, "before mortification sets in. It is the only way."

"But I don't want the other body."

"Isn't it better than none?"

"I don't know or care. I want my own body."

"Well, you can't have it while the other fellow is in possession."

"Then what am I to do!"

"He'll astralize himself before very long," consoled Hicks Carew. "It has become a passion with him. All you have to do is to keep watch, and take possession again at the first opportunity."

"I won't do it," I replied obstinately. "If I can't have my own body, I'll remain as I am."

"Think of Angeline!"

"Of course she'll see a difference. Oh, what *shall* I do!"

"Do as I tell you. Keep that other body alive. You'll never get your own body back unless you do."

"Suppose it does die—how will he know?"

"He'll see it in the papers. Now go. Hurry, or you'll be too late."

Sadly I turned away. The other body was located without difficulty. I looked at it with a growing repulsion that nearly drove me to insanity. As I have said, it was about the size of my own, but, oh! such a face! It made me ache just to think of wearing it. There was not a hair on the crown of the dirty head, and only seven teeth in the repulsive mouth. For several minutes I stood there beside that caricature of humanity, trying to summon courage to step inside.

Finally, with a supreme effort, I fought back my growing dislike, and stepped into that awful body. It was cold and stiff. It felt as if it had always been cold and stiff and unreliable and diseased and unresponsive. How I hated it!

"I'll go back," I threatened, "and if I don't make that fellow pay, then my name is not—" But what *was* my name—the name of this unspeakable body? And how could I hurt my enemy as long as he remained in my body? And would he ever come out of it, if I angered him?

Later, I remembered that I was now in England, while my own body was in my home in Wisconsin. How could I take the body I now occupied across the ocean? I could find no money in its pockets. Its clothes looked as if they had been discarded by some one else. Without doubt, this body had never been very well cared for.

I had hardly adjusted myself to my new quarters, when I was aroused by the entrance of two women into the dingy little room where I was lying. One of them was weeping bitterly. She was a thin woman of most unprepossessing appearance, untidy, unfed, uncherished, undecided, unloved, unnecessary. I could see it all at the first glance through my stubby eye-lashes. She came to the bed and stood looking at me while her companion placed her hand over my heart—I mean, over the other fellow's heart, which my personality had set in motion.

"Why, no, Liz!" exclaimed the other woman, in surprised displeasure, "Jack ain't dead. There hain't no sech good luck as that for you this time."

The woman used the pronunciation of the uncultured English; but, as I have not heard it since my terrible experience, and had never heard it before, I must be excused from trying to reproduce it here. The above attempt ought to convince you, as it does me, that I can't do it. I promise you that, in all other respects, my story shall be true to fact.

The woman who wept, Liz by name, was evidently the wife of my enemy. She threw herself upon me with such force that I gasped for breath, and then, Oh, horror! she began covering my face with kisses. For the first time I rejoiced that I wore the face of another. To be kissed by that woman—then I remembered the appearance of the face she was kissing, and remained passive. If she wanted to do it, she certainly ought to have the privilege! It surely could be no worse for me than it was for her.

All this time I had kept my eyes nearly closed. I knew they thought me unconscious, and I was thus enabled to gain time in which to try to collect my thoughts and decide on a course of action.

Soon a doctor came into the room, and the woman explained to him that Jack was not dead, after all. The one who was not Liz added, "More's the pity," and won a measure of my respect by so doing.

The doctor asked Liz some questions, and so I ascertained that I had often had these queer spells and that I sometimes lay for hours at a time like one dead. This information filled me with joy. I now felt sure that my enemy was a confirmed astralization toper, just as Hicks Carew had told me. I now dared believe that it would not be long before he would leave my body for another trip through the atmosphere.

"How does he appear when he comes conscious?" asked the doctor.

"Just as ugly as ever," replied the woman who was, evidently, a sister of Liz. "He'll look like a dead man one minute," she continued, "and I'll begin to have some hope that Liz is going to be a widow and have a chance for her life; but the next minute he'll sit up and begin to swear, and, like as not, he'll knock her over the head with a boot-jack."

Liz wept silently. It was disgusting enough to think of her kissing such a face as I wore; but to have her weep for me when I had knocked her over the head with a boot-jack was simply unendurable. I despised her from that moment, and longed to tell her so.

Then I thought of Angeline. Suppose that brute, who had possession of my body, should awaken and knock Angeline over the head with a boot-jack! Suppose he should swear at her!

Angeline had never heard me swear. Indeed, I had never spoken to her unkindly but once in my life, and that was when she had used my razor to chip dried beef. Then I told her, calmly but firmly—but no matter! I was sorry for it afterward, and bought a ribbon bow which I tied on the handle of the razor; then gave it to Angeline to keep purposely to chip dried beef with.

I bought a fine new razor for myself, which I kept under lock and key. But as I lay there in that horrible English cabin, with those two miserable women near me, I thought of Angeline, and wished I had left the new razor where she could find it in case the other was lost or dulled.

I did not open my eyes. Tears from the eyes of the affectionate Liz made my borrowed face uncomfortably damp, but it was better than to open my eyes to a situation that would very likely be worse than anything I had yet experienced.

Oh, how I wished I had never astralized myself. I even went so far as to wish that I had never seen Helen. If it had not been for her I meditated, I should not have been made to suffer as I was suffering now. What right had she to lead me into temptation! Angeline and I were as happy as turtle doves until she came between us.

I had never loved her, and never given her any opportunity to think I did, and none but an unwomanly woman, a very unwomanly woman, would accept such attentions as I had offered. I was sure that nothing would ever have induced Angeline to go sailing through the atmosphere with any astral but mine; but Helen was absolutely devoid of delicacy. It was so easy for unsuspecting men like me to be taken in by a designing woman!

I formed many good resolutions as I lay there, but all were secondary to the wish that Liz would use a pocket handkerchief when she wept, or else stop kissing me.

"Don't take on like that," said the doctor kindly. "I think he'll be himself again in a little while. He is not sick. He has only been a little drunker than usual."

"Indeed, indeed, sir," said Liz, with pathetic earnestness, "he was not drunk this time. He never has these spells when he has plenty of money to buy whisky. I've seen him drunk many and many a time, and I know these spells are different."

The doctor smiled, and said something to the sister which I did not catch. It was evident that he was quite sure Jack was drunk, and I presume he would have been no less sure of it had I opened my eyes and given him a truthful account of what had happened.

"Liz puts me out of all patience," said the sister. "How can she be fool enough to care for a man who treats her as Jack does? I'd have killed him long ago and fed him to the hogs."

How I did wish that she, instead of Liz, had been Jack's wife. In all probability she would never have allowed him to live long enough to become an astral.

"I really believe you would," replied the doctor, with a little laugh of amusement. "Well, there does not seem to be much that can be done to arouse him, so I may as well go. I think he will come to himself before long. If he becomes worse, however, send for me."

Send for him, indeed! What could he do?

When the doctor had left, the sister, whose name was Jane, persuaded Liz to go out with her and have a cup of tea, and I was alone.

I rose, immediately, and began to look for something decent to wear. I had no idea as to where those women had gone for their tea, or how long they would be away; but of one thing I was very sure; I must get away from them just as quick as the Lord would let me, and I hated to be seen in rags. But go I must, no matter how I looked. I felt that I would be a failure should I try to personate Jack, and there was no telling what might result should it be discovered that my nature was not what his had been.

It might work Liz up to a demonstration of affection that would induce me to kill her! I could not beat her over the head with a boot-jack, as I knew I should be expected to do, or swear at her, or drag her around the room by her little wisp of uncombed hair, or do any of the other things which Jane had enumerated as being among my favorite methods of diversion.

Had I known just how Liz would have regarded my conversion to a better life, I might not have felt so uneasy. But if I should be the means of leading her to renewed efforts in the art of weeping—should she fall on my neck or hold my head on her bosom while she wept into my face, or let her tears drop steadily on my bald crown, or attempt any of the styles described in books that discuss such topics—Oh, heavens! the very thought lent speed to my movements. I had had more than enough of the damp Elizabeth.

I soon decided that I was wearing all the clothes I owned. And the women were coming back! Very well! I cautiously made my exit through a back window, and felt a bit of my trousers cling to a nail and separate from the garment. I had never, in the most depressing periods of my life, seen myself going through the streets of any town with a hole in my trousers that could not be invisible except when I was seated.

It was easy to get away from the house because the early morning was dimmed with heavy fog.

"What is the number of this house?" I asked of a man who was evidently going to work.

He told me, with a leer, and asked me where I got the money for drink, this time.

"I am not drunk," I replied. "I am a stranger here. Can you tell me the name of the man who lives in that house?"

"Do you mean Jack Walsh?" he asked, then he called to a comrade.

"Come here, Bill! Jack is so drunk that he can't tell what his name is."

"It isn't Jack," said Bill, after studying me a few minutes. "Jack couldn't be so civil spoken if 'twas to save him from being hung."

The men finally decided that I was Jack's brother, and I let it go at that.

I went out into the country and threw myself under a tree, where I hoped I should be free from intruders. I had decided to astralize myself again and endeavor to discover what was going on at home. I could think of no better way in which to spend my time waiting for my own body to be vacated.

All I would need to do would be to inhabit my borrowed body just enough to keep it alive, and finally leave it where I found it, so that, in case its rightful owner wished to claim it, he would have no excuse for troubling me further.

CHAPTER FOUR

WITH what haste I sped me across the Atlantic! How my soul rejoiced when it was once more pushing its way through the ether of its native land! Hope was at the helm. Who could guess what good thing was in store for me?

I might find my body vacated, and not so very stiff and cold! I might find my intolerable tenant ready to return to his own wife, just keeping my body warm until I came to claim it. Surely, I had suffered enough. I had a right to expect release—and especially when I asked so little of life—only the privilege of living in my own body—of taking possession, never again to leave it, until Death should come to claim me.

Noon. When I entered my home, the clock on the mantel pointed to twelve. The lower floor looked untidy, neglected, unnatural, as it sometimes did when Angeline had been away from home for a few days. I was immediately thrown into a chill of apprehension that shook me as the dying flame of a candle is shaken by a breeze.

I knew something was wrong. Had Angeline gone to her mother? Had she decided, so soon, that her husband was no longer to be endured? What had that man done to her? Had she failed to know—down in the depths of her heart—that it was not her faithful Joe who had abused her? Couldn't she have guessed that some wandering astral was controlling his body? Wouldn't Helen have given her a clue to the trouble—if some fearful thing had happened during my absence? Wouldn't she hunt up Hicks Carew, and beg his assistance?

These thoughts flashed through my mind as I hastened upstairs, going directly to the room where my wife had slept.

The room was darkened. Angeline lay stretched on the bed. A nurse, a doctor, and several weeping relatives stood about the bed. Helen came in. She too had been weeping.

"How is she?" asked Helen, bending over the bed. "Will she live?"

"I think so," replied the doctor gravely—"but it will be a long time before she will be herself again."

"Did he strike her as hard as that!" exclaimed Helen, adding, fiercely, "The brute! He ought to be hung. I'd like to help do it."

I could see, now, that the sentiment was like her. She would be as thrilled as when she saw the rude body of a devotee stretched on a couch of sharp spikes.

"It was not the blow, so much," said the doctor, "as the thought that her husband could have been angry enough to strike her. That is the real cause of this prostration."

"And because he was drunk," added one of the relatives—"beastly drunk, and he spoke for the Drys at the last election."

The worst had happened. Jack Walsh had used my arm to hit my wife with my boot-jack. And I was powerless to return the blow. I was powerless to do anything, except rage—and that did not mend matters. The gentle breeze coming through the window could fan the pure brow of my suffering wife—but I could do nothing, nothing.

And I was to blame for her condition. In no way could she be made to bear a share of the responsibility—as every husband understands a wife should do whenever that sacred duty can be forced upon her. If the suffering had come to Helen, or to Hicks Carew, then would victorious Justice be able to wave her scales triumphantly! But that poor, innocent, patient Angeline should be like this—would no one speak a word in my behalf!

"Of course, Mr. Scranton was not himself," said the doctor.

"How do you mean—not himself!" asked Helen. I could see that she was frightened. She feared our secret was about to be discovered.

Not for my sake, not for Angeline's, not for all the world, would she freely and frankly confess, and so offer a solution to this incomprehensible thing that had happened, the cruel report that would soon be placed before the eyes of my world: *Joe Scranton struck his wife with a bootjack, inflicting injuries that may prove fatal.*

That was what I would have to live down when I was once more in possession of my body.

"How do you mean—not himself!" repeated Helen.

"I am told he was very drunk," replied the doctor, "consequently he couldn't have been himself, and should not be blamed as one would blame a perfectly normal man—"

"Why not?" interrupted my sister-in-law. "He was not compelled to get drunk. The stuff wasn't poured down him—and he knew he'd get drunk if he took it. Why shouldn't he suffer the consequences?"

"I think he will," replied the doctor. "I've known Joe Scranton a long time. He was a fine fellow. He is bound to be very sorry—"

"Sorry!" interrupted my sister-in-law once more; "he'll say so, of course—in fact, he has already said so—but I'm bound to say he doesn't act as heartbroken as any decent man would who had half killed his wife."

It reminded me of England and Liz's sister, and I wondered if all sisters-in-law were not inclined to be vindictive, given any provocation whatsoever.

"I must say," chimed in the nurse, "that he doesn't appear to me to be so very repentant. I've seen similar cases—where there was another woman in the case—mind, I'm not saying there was another woman in this instance—"

"You never can tell," replied my sister-in-law, gloomily. "I always have my doubts of these very pleasant appearing men whom everyone likes."

"I am very sure, however," said Helen, a little nervously, "that Mr. Scranton was absolutely devoted to his wife."

"That may be true," replied the nurse doubtfully; "but if I were related to poor Mrs. Scranton the first thing I should do would be to employ a detective."

She said this, looking straight into Helen's eyes, and Helen looked daggers at her, without, however, discomposing her in the least.

"Your idea is a good one," said my sister-in-law, warmly.

"It may lead to the conclusion that this attack was attempted murder," replied the nurse. "It may enable you to provide for your poor sister's safety as you could not do with her husband hanging around the house."

So that was where the affair was leading! There was to be an attempt to put my body in jail. Angeline's family were advised to protect her from a husband who had never in all his life spoken an unkind word to her.

I wondered what Helen was thinking about it—what she would do about it. She surely could not remain silent. While nothing could have been purer than the feeling she and I had entertained for each other, yet she must realize that a few infernal hints from dear, sweet, disinterested old hags, our reputations would be blackened forever.

"Helen!" I exclaimed, close to her ear; "get busy. Go see Hicks Carew. You can't know what has happened to me, but he knows all about it. Make him help us out of this scrape."

But Helen did not seem to have heard a word.

Next, I tried to make Angeline feel my presence. I hoped that the sacred link between husband and wife must surely vibrate when played upon by my empassioned protestations.

"Arouse yourself, Angeline!" I implored; "it is I who speak—I, Joe—your lover and your slave. Let your soul see my astral form; then you'll understand."

I bent over my sweet wife and pressed kisses on her lips and cheeks and eye-lids, and on the cruel bruise across her brow. I felt so intensely that it seemed impossible she should not feel my presence. I exerted myself until it seemed as if my soul would burst its astral covering, but in vain; I might as well have been baying at the moon. Angeline did, indeed, open her eyes, but not at my summons.

Angeline opened her eyes and sat up in bed, her eyes fixed upon Helen with a baleful stare that was uncanny. She had heard what the nurse said. She was prepared to believe that her husband had tried to kill her. Not only had she heard that there might be another woman, she

had definitely determined in her own mind who that other woman was.

"Leave the room," she said, "all of you!" But her eyes were fixed on Helen. "I want to be alone." Then she burst into a violent fit of weeping.

I really felt sorry for Helen. This had come upon her like a bolt out of a clear sky. She had really believed that ours was a friendship that could have no disastrous consequences. How terrible was her awakening.

"You want me near you, sister, don't you?" asked Miriam tenderly.

"Better leave her with the nurse," said the doctor, then Miriam and Helen left the room, but not together. The other relatives followed Miriam. I went with Helen, who entered the library and faced Jack Walsh, who had already converted my body into a most unpleasant object.

"Joe," she said angrily, "I want you to tell me what's the matter with you."

"Matter? Nothing ails me." My lips were moving—the lips of my longed-for body. My voice sounded quite natural—but the real *I* was not speaking. I was listening.

"You are terribly changed," exclaimed Helen. "You are not like yourself at all. Don't you realize that?"

"Oh, Joe, Joe, what is it?" Helen went closer to my body, and spoke in a low tone, quite confidentially. "Tell me! Has it anything to do with—with our experience?"

"Huh?" My body suddenly sat erect, but the expression in its eyes was certainly very different from any that I had ever shot into them. "What's that yeh say? Experience?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten—"

"Forgotten nothing," mumbled my enemy; "but my mind's funny; give it a jog. What was yeh saying?"

"Our experience," faltered Helen. "There was nothing to talk about, was there? Surely you understood that my friendship for you was purely platonic—"

"Platonic fiddlesticks," replied my lips with a rude laugh. "You and I know there's nothing in that, my dear."

For a moment I thought Helen would faint, she became so deathly pale. She felt her way to the window, as if she had been blind, and leaned for a moment against the casement.

I stood beside her and tried to whisper in her ear. It seemed to me that she who had so long made a study of the science which had brought all this trouble upon us might be influenced by me to guess the true state of affairs; but whether I made any impression upon her or not, I could not tell. She turned once again toward my form.

"Mr. Scranton," she said, with a meaning look toward the box of cigars and the bottle of brandy on my study table, "will you kindly tell me how long it has been since you began to smoke and drink?"

"Egad!" exclaimed my lips, with a repetition of the brutal laugh, "I should think it had been some time since I left off, judging by the difficulty I had in finding anything to drink or smoke, and the beastly state my stomach is in."

Helen left the room without another word. I could not accompany her, for I knew that I must return to that detestable body which I had left under the trees in that pretty English wood and warm it up enough to keep it alive. I must, but how could I! How could I leave my wife, while she was suffering, even though I could not help her? I looked around me. My beautiful home! How could I go away from it—

"Damn it," I muttered, " how could I ever have been ass enough to go on those damn fool trips!"

I left the house and went to find Hicks Carew. If he refused to help me, I vowed that he should not live long after I came into possession of my own body. He should pay—how dearly I'd make him pay for all I had suffered!

Hicks Carew was not at home. He had gone on one of his mysterious journeys about which he never took anyone into his confidence. There was no guessing when he would return.

When I finally started for England, I was suffering the torments of the damned. I was nearly crazed with apprehension concerning my wife, my home, my own most desirable body. It was evident that it had been a long time since my enemy had had money with which to buy brandy and tobacco in sufficient quantities to satisfy him, and I dreaded the effect of his indulgence on my poor body, almost as much as I worried over the damage he would do my reputation. And would he ever again astralize himself? Might he not find his present life so much to his liking that the joys of astralization would be weak in comparison?

I believe that no one deliberately astralizes himself who does not hope to enjoy some pleasure that would not otherwise be his, and which appears greater than anything yet experienced. What could astralization give to such a man as Jack Walsh that he would find preferable to the life I had led? I had never so fully realized the extreme desirability of my lot in life, as I did now that I seemed to be shut out from it forever.

Had hope entirely deserted me, however, I should never have returned to my enemy's body. I mean I should never have gone in search of it; for, when I arrived at the place where I had left it, it was gone. Gone! Not a trace of it was to be seen.

What had become of it? My astral stiffened with the agony of terror, and I sobbed a sad farewell to all that I had loved. I could not hope, now, to get my body back.

How long I mourned I do not know. Nor can I tell what it was that whispered to me not to give up. I knew, then, that I should continue the struggle as long as memory persisted.

"I must concentrate," I thought, I must demand assistance. That Something which just whispered to me must tell me what to do next. "Lead me to that body," I demanded; "lead me to it, I say." My entire being entered into that desire. "That body! that beastly body. Lead me to it."

I had reached a point where I could realize that, horrible as it was to be obliged to warm such a body into life, it was still more horrible to be deprived of the privilege of so doing.

What had become of it? Had it been eaten by wild beasts? Was there, in England, any wild beast hungry enough to touch it?

No. It must be in the hands of medical students. That seemed more likely. I believed that medical students were certainly less fastidious than any wild beast of which I had ever read. Should I begin my search in the hospital or the morgue? I knew so little of the life of such men as Jack Walsh that I could not at once decide upon the best course to pursue, and I seemed to be getting no help from my prayers.

And that pesky body could not live forever! Even though it were still habitable, it must be on the verge of dissolution.

CHAPTER FIVE

I FINALLY decided to go back to Liz and her sister, trusting to gather from their conversation some news of the whereabouts of Jack's body.

As good luck would have it, that body was being carried up the steps in a long black box, just as I arrived.

Jane opened the door.

"Well," she said, in a tone of extreme satisfaction, "I fancy he's dead enough for keeps this time!"

"Dead as a door nail," replied one of the men who carried the box.

I almost collapsed from discouragement. I had not thought that I could feel so badly at the mere suggestion that I might never more be able to climb into that unpleasant body.

"It will be hard on his wife, won't it?" asked another of the men.

"I presume so, just at first," replied Jane; "but she'll get over it, and it is the luckiest thing that ever happened to her."

"Shall we leave the body in this box?"

"Is it the cheapest box you have?"

"No."

"Take it out and bring a cheaper one. He doesn't deserve any at all. If it were not for Liz I would sell him to a medical college, and try to get back a part of the money he owes me."

The men took the body from the box, greatly to my relief, laid it on a board, and left it.

Liz came in and threw herself upon it, and began to weep into its face and press moist kisses upon it with her thin lips. I looked on, and hesitated. Could I endure that? It was bad enough just to see it done, when the face had no feeling. But to have it animated by my personality—faugh! it made me sick.

Yet it was my one hope of ever again enjoying Angeline's companionship on earth. That thought decided me. Without further hesitation, I climbed into the body. It was so stiff and unyielding that I feared I should never be able to adjust myself to it. It seemed to me that long hours passed before I was enabled to warm any portion of it into life, and I looked with horror upon the preparations that were being made for its burial. I even began to long for the presence of Liz, when she was away from me; for I knew she would be most likely to detect signs of returning life. As for Jane, I was equally certain that, should she detect such signs, she would only hasten the funeral ceremonies.

It may seem a paradox when I tell you that it was a joyous moment for me when Liz pressed her lips against Jack's cheek (I will not call it mine even for the sake of perspicuity), felt that it was warm, kissed it again, and, with a wild shriek, fainted away upon Jack's bosom.

I felt that I should die of collapsed anatomy if I did not get her off, for I had allowed Jack's body to go so long without food that it would not stand much more. I made a superhuman effort, however, gave a convulsive twitch, and sent Liz flying to the floor. At this moment Jane entered the room, and Liz revived.

"Oh," exclaimed Liz joyfully, "Jack is not dead! Jack is not dead! He knocked me down, Jane; as sure as you live, he has knocked me down once more!"

"And you seem to be tickled stiff," exclaimed Jane contemptuously.

"Why, Jane!' faltered the poor thing, "it was terrible to have Jack dead."

"Terrible!" There was menace in Jane's voice. I sat up, ready to defend myself, for I feared she might try to damage the body I had sought so earnestly.

"You miserable—" (I'll add "reprobate," because what she really called me wouldn't look well in print. She was in a frame of mind where she could make the alphabet sound blasphemous.)

"It is good to be here," I murmured, for I had decided upon a new plan. "It is very good to be here, but I cannot remain under false pretences. I have decided to be absolutely truthful."

Jane stared, eyes round as a saucer, mouth wide open, jaw hanging helplessly. Liz whimpered. They had never been more astonished in their lives. I had really started on a dangerous adventure, but I did not realize that because I could not realize what a shock I was giving them. I was thinking entirely of my new plan to escape the demonstrations of Liz.

"Oh, God, what ails him now," wailed Liz.

"Shut up," commanded her sister; "you ought to be glad he isn't pounding you."

"You will not be pounded while I am here," I said solemnly.

"Jack Walsh," demanded Jane, "what deviltry are you up to now?"

"My name is not Jack Walsh," I replied, with dignity and firmness, but in my most courteous manner. "It may be hard for you to believe, but my name is Joe Scranton, and I live in Wisconsin, U. S. A., where I am a citizen who has always been most highly respected. Won't you be good enough to tell that to the editor of one of your daily papers?"

"Jackie," pleaded Liz, "don't talk like that. Don't you know your own woman?"

"Stand back, Mrs. Walsh," I said sternly, as I put her away from me. "I have a wife at home. Her name is Angeline. I am true to her. You must not kiss me again."

"Crazy!" said Jane. "We'll just trot him off to the bug house—"

"No, no, Jane," wailed Liz.

Then Jane turned to me. She was furious.

"You thief," she said, "why couldn't you have stayed dead!"

I got her point of view all right, and I respected her for it. But her manner was rather more insulting than I thought the case warranted. I decided that I'd still reply as a gentleman—but I would give free rein to my sarcastic methods of speech, of which I had sometimes been proud.

"Remain dead?" I asked, "and leave you behind? Do I deserve such torture as that?"

Again Jane stared. "I'll be frizzled," she said, slowly, "if he isn't talking like a priest now!"

It was quite apparent that sarcasm was lost on those two. What could I do next? I was hungry. Should I ask for food?

"May I inquire," I said politely, "what you have in the house that might be cooked for an invalid?"

There was absolutely no reply. Even the doughty Jane was stunned. I realized that I must eat to keep that body going, and that food could not safely be long delayed.

"See here, my beauty," I thundered, "get out into that kitchen and rustle up something for my breakfast. D'ye hear me? Then git!"

Jane folded her arms, and studied me without speaking.

"Liz," I said softly, thinking it better to try another tack—"Liz, can't you understand that I need food? Won't you be good enough to get me something to eat?"

"Oh Jack," wailed Liz, "you're not yourself, at all! Oh, my pretty Jack, are you going to die and leave me?"

And this after I had tried my best to be a brute! Liz threw herself into my arms, and her huge tears rolled down my neck. It made me mad, and I threw her from me again, with such force that she staggered.

"Stop that infernal nonsense," I thundered, "and bring me something to eat."

"I have no money," wailed Liz.

"Where do *you* get food?"

"Jane gives it to me."

"Then Jane must bring some to me."

"Never!" exclaimed Jane, with fierce determination.

"You shall be paid for it, you fool! Think I want to beg—Keep off. Keep off, both of you, or I'll kill you deader than smelts."

Evidently Jack had not been in the habit of suggesting that he might pay for food. Both women showed unmistakable signs of an intention to rush into my arms and weep on my neck, and I only saved myself by springing to my feet

and assuming the attitude of a prize fighter.

To my intense joy food was brought without further parley. It consisted of a bowl of oatmeal porridge and a slice of black bread without butter. It did not look at all tempting, but I recollected that Jack's body was in need of nourishment, and was, in all probability, used to nothing better.

"Will you tell me," I said, swallowing the broth as I would medicine, "what sort of work a man like me can get to do?"

Liz made a rush for me when I asked the question, and I backed against the wall and held the bread as if I would hurl it at her.

"Keep off, Liz!" I shouted. "If your dripping face comes within five feet of mine, I'll mash it flat."

It was harsh language to use to a woman, and one of the most steadfast of her sex at that, but I was desperate.

"Let him alone, Liz," said Jane. "If he is thinking of going to work, for pity's sake don't distract his mind."

Then Jane turned to me.

"I know of several warehouses that need sweeping," she said.

"Where?" I asked.

"I'll get the work, you do it, and I'll take in the cash."

"Indeed! Why can't I handle my own cash?"

"Yours! You have a number of debts to pay before anything could be yours by right. If you get one penny of it you'll never pay me a cent for what I have done for you and Liz."

I finally consented to Jane's arrangement, greatly to her surprise, and spent that day in sweeping warehouses. I felt that I could not be under obligations to a woman for food, even though it was not my own body that I was trying to keep alive, and I had no idea where a man like Jack would find work. I could do no better, until I became used to my strange surroundings, than to let Jane run me. She softened perceptibly, when she saw how faithfully I applied myself, and fed me well. That was what I wanted.

I had decided to get Jack's body in good working order. Then I would work my passage across the Atlantic—from there to Wisconsin. When I reached home, I would try to obtain possession of my body. Failing in that, I would have two strong, material hands with which to choke the life out of my body, rendering it useless to my enemy. Then I would cut Jack's throat.

I might be committing a crime, but at least I could relieve Angeline of the presence of my enemy, and do no harm to Liz. I realized that punishment might follow, for I had no right to hasten my departure into the next world, but I believed that I could not be forever punished for my desperate attempt to right a wrong.

This Unusual Story Will Be Concluded in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. Your Newsdealer Will Reserve a Copy for You

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Aged Man Kills Wife, Self and "Other Woman"

THE final chapter of a triangle love affair was written in Battle Creek, Mich., recently, when John H. Wills, 74, a wealthy retired business man murdered his wife, Ella, 68, and Mrs. Maggie M. Stewart, 53, and then committed suicide.

For several months, it was learned, Mrs. Wills had been trying to break up á love affair between her husband and Mrs. Stewart, having several times threatened divorce proceedings. The tragedy is ascribed to this.

Under the pretense of taking Mrs. Stewart for a ride, Wills drove her to a remote spot six miles from the city, shot her in the head and then cut her throat with a razor. Upon returning home, he immediately shot his wife and then killed himself.

Bodies of Wills and his wife were found in their apartment by a newspaper reporter who broke down the door after hearing shots. Search for Mrs. Stewart's body was started after a nephew of Wills' had told police his uncle declared that she would be found beyond the city limits near an old bridge.

World Ice To Wipe Out Continents

GREAT changes will take place in the geographic structure of the world and many of the continents will be completely wiped out during the next world ice epoch, which is now somewhat overdue, according to the statement of Prof. Gregory of Yale university, American representative to the Pan-Pacific Science congress at Melbourne.

The last great expansion of ice occurred 20,000 years ago, and previously there were four or five similar advances from the poles, with warm periods intervening, said Prof. Gregory.

During the next advance, according to Prof. Gregory, all high lands will become glaciated, the map of the world will undergo changes, and the North American continent will disappear as far south as the great lakes. Scandinavia, Scotland, a part of England, and a large part of Asia and Siberia will be wiped out. Switzerland, owing to its high lands, will be entirely obliterated.

From the Antarctic ocean a large slice of South America, including most of Chile, will be overrun, and the southern portion of New Zealand will suffer.

Here's a Story of Creeping Horror
That Rises, Gradually, To a Powerful Climax
It's a Story Not Easily Forgotten

The Phantom Farm House

By SEABURY QUINN

I HAD been at the new Braircliff Sanitarium nearly three weeks before I actually saw the house.

Every morning, as I lay abed after the nurse had taken my temperature, I wondered what was beyond the copse of fir and spruce at the turn of the road. The picture seemed incomplete without chimneys rising among the evergreens. I thought about it so much I finally convinced myself there really was a house in the wood. A house where people lived and worked and were happy.

All during the long, trying days when I was learning to navigate a wheel-chair, I used to picture the house and the people who lived in it. There would be a father, I was sure; a stout, good-natured father, somewhat bald, who sat on the porch and smoked a cob pipe in the evening. And there was a mother, too; a waistless, plaid-skirted mother with hair smoothly parted over her forehead, who sat beside the father as he rocked and smoked, and who had a brown work-basket in her lap. She spread the stocking feet over her outstretched fingers and her vigilant needle spied out and closed every hole with a cunning no mechanical loom could rival.

Then there was a daughter. I was a little hazy in my conception of her; but I knew she was tall and slender as a hazel wand, and that her eyes were blue and wide and sympathetic.

Picturing the house and its people became a favorite pastime with me during the time I was acquiring the art of walking all over again. By the time I was able to trust my legs on the road I felt I knew my way to my vision-friends' home as well as I knew the by-ways of my own parish; though I had as yet not set foot outside the sanitarium.

Oddly enough, I chose the evening for my first long stroll. It was unusually warm for September in Maine, and some

of the sturdier of the convalescents had been playing tennis during the afternoon. After dinner they sat on the veranda, comparing notes on their respective cases of influenza, or matching experiences in appendicitis operations.

After building the house bit by bit from my imagination, as a child pieces together a picture puzzle, I should have been bitterly disappointed if the woods had proved empty; yet when I reached the turn of the road and found my dream

house a reality, I was almost afraid. Bit for bit and part for part, it was as I had visualized it.

A long, rambling, comfortable-looking farmhouse it was, with a wide porch screened by vines, and a white-washed picket fence about the little clearing before it. There was a tumbledown gate in the fence, one of the kind that is held shut with a weighted chain. Looking closely, I saw the weight was a disused ploughshare. Leading from gate to porch was a path of flat stones, laid unevenly in the short grass, and bordered with a double row of clam shells. A lamp burned in the front room, sending out cheerful golden rays to meet the silver moonlight.

A strange, eerie sensation came over me as I stood there. Somehow, I felt I had seen that house before; many, many times before; yet I had never been in that part of Maine till I came to Briarcliff, nor had anyone ever described the place to me. Indeed, except for my idle dreams, I had had no intimation that there was a house in those pines at all.

"WHO lives in the house at the turn of the road?" I asked the fat man who roomed next to me.

He looked at me as blankly as if I had addressed him in Choctaw, then countered, "What road?"

"Why, the South road," I explained. "I mean the house in the pines—just beyond the curve, you know."

If such a thing had not been obviously absurd, I should have thought he looked frightened at my answer. Certainly his already prominent eyes started a bit further from his face.

"Nobody lives there," he assured me. "Nobody's lived there for years. There isn't any house there."

I became angry. What right had this fellow to make my civil question the occasion for an ill-timed jest? "As you please," I replied. "Perhaps there isn't any house there for *you;* but I saw one there last night."

"My God!" he ejaculated, and hurried away as if I'd just told him I was infected with smallpox.

Later in the day I overheard a snatch of conversation between him and one of his acquaintances in the lounge.

"I tell you it's so," he was saying with great earnestness. "I thought it was all a lot of poppycock, myself; but that clergyman saw it last night. I'm going to pack my traps and get back to the city, and not waste any time about it, either."

"Rats!" his companion scoffed. "He must have been stringing you."

Turning to light a cigar, he caught sight of me. "Say, Mr. Weatherby," he called, "you didn't mean to tell my friend here that you really saw a house down by those pines last night, did you?"

"I certainly did," I answered, "and I tell you, too. There's nothing unusual about it, is there?"

"Is there?" he repeated. "*Is* there? Say, what'd it look like?"

I described it to him as well as I could, and his eyes grew as wide as those of a child hearing the story of Bluebeard.

"Well, I'll be a Chinaman's uncle!" he declared as I finished. "I sure will!"

"See here," I demanded. "What's all the mystery about that farmhouse? Why shouldn't I see it? It's there to be seen, isn't it?"

He gulped once or twice, as if there were something hot in his mouth, before he answered:

"Look here, Mr. Weatherby, I'm telling you this for your own good. You'd better stay in o' nights; and you'd better stay away from those pines in particular."

Nonplussed at this unsolicited advice, I was about to ask an explanation, when I detected the after-tang of whisky on his breath. I understood, then. I was being made the butt of a drunken joke by a pair of race course followers.

"I'm very much obliged, I'm sure;" I replied with dignity, "but if you don't mind, I'll choose my own comings and goings."

"Oh, go as far as you like—" he waved his arms wide in token of my complete free-agency—"go as far as you like. I'm going to New York."

And he did. The pair of them left the sanitarium that afternoon.

A SLIGHT recurrence of my illness held me housebound for several days after my conversation with the two sportively inclined gentlemen, and the next time I ventured out at night the moon had waxed to the full, pouring a flood of light upon the earth that rivaled midday. The minutest objects were as readily distinguished as they would have been before sunset; in fact, I remember comparing the evening to a silver-plated noon.

As I trudged along the road to the pine copse I was busy formulating plans for intruding into the family circle at the farmhouse; devising all manner of pious frauds by which to scrape acquaintance.

"Shall I feign having lost my way, and inquire direction to the sanitarium; or shall I ask if some mythical acquaintance, a John Squires, for instance, lives there?" I asked myself as I neared the turn of the road.

Fortunately for my conscience, all these subterfuges were unnecessary, for as I neared the whitewashed fence, a girl left the porch and walked quickly to the gate, where she stood gazing pensively along the moonlit road. It was almost as if she were coming to meet me, I thought, as I slackened my pace and assumed an air of deliberate casualness.

Almost abreast of her, I lowered my cadence still more, and looked directly at her. Then I knew why my conception of the girl who lived in that house had been misty and indistinct. For the same reason the venerable John had faltered in his description of the New Jerusalem until his vision in the Isle of Patmos.

From the smoothly parted hair above her wide, forget-me-not eyes, to the hem of her white cotton frock, she was as slender and lovely as a Rossetti saint; as wonderful to the eye as a Mediaeval poet's vision of his lost love in paradise. Her forehead, evenly framed in the beaten bronze of her hair, was wide and high, and startlingly white, and her brows were delicately penciled as if laid on by an artist with a camel's hair brush. The eyes themselves were sweet and clear as forest pools mirroring the September sky, and lifted a little at the corners, like an Oriental's, giving her face a quaint, exotic look in the midst of these Maine woods.

So slender was her figure that the swell of her bosom was barely perceptible under the light stuff of her dress, and, as she stood immobile in the nimbus of moon rays, the undulation of the line from her shoulders to ankles was what painters call a "curve of motion."

One hand rested lightly on the gate, finely cut as a bit of Italian sculpture, and scarcely less white than the limed wood supporting it. I noticed idly that the forefinger was somewhat longer than its fellows, and that the nails were almond shaped and very pink—almost red—as if they had been rouged and brightly polished.

No man can take stock of a woman thus, even in a cursory, fleeting glimpse, without her being aware of the inspection, and in the minute my eyes drank up her beauty, our glances crossed and held.

The look she gave back was as calm and unperturbed as though I had been nonexistent; one might have thought I was an invisible wraith of the night; yet the faint suspicion of a flush quickening in her throat and cheeks told me she was neither unaware nor unappreciative of my scrutiny.

Mechanically, I raised my cap, and, wholly without conscious volition, I heard my own voice asking:

"May I trouble you for a drink from your well? I'm from the sanitarium—only a few days out of bed, in fact—and I fear I've overdone myself in my walk."

A smile flitted across her rather wide lips, quick and sympathetic as a mother's response to her child's request, as she swung the gate open for me.

"Surely—" she answered, and her voice had all the sweetness of the south wind soughing through her native pines—"surely you may drink at our well, and rest yourself, too—if you wish."

She preceded me up the path, quickening her pace as she neared the house, and running nimbly up the steps to the porch. From where I stood beside the old-fashioned well, fitted with windlass and bucket, I could hear the sound of whispering voices in earnest conversation. Hers I recognized, lowered though it was, by the flutelike purling of its tones; the other two were deeper, and, it seemed to me, hoarse and throaty. Somehow, odd as it seemed, there was a queer, canine note in them, dimly reminding me of the muttering of not too friendly dogs—such fractious growls I had heard while doing missionary duty in Alaska, when the savage, half-wolf malamutes were not fed promptly at the relay stations.

Her voice rose a thought higher, as if in argument, and I fancied I heard her whisper, "This one is mine, I tell you; mine. I'll brook no interference. Go to your own hunting."

An instant more there was a reluctant assenting growl from the shadow of the vines curtaining the porch, and a light laugh from the girl as she descended the steps, swinging a bright tin cup in her hand. For a second she looked at me, as she sent the bucket plunging into the stone-curbed well; then she announced, in explanation:

"We're great hunters here, you know. The season is just in, and Dad and I have the worst quarrels about whose game is whose."

She laughed in recollection of their argument, and I laughed with her. I had been quite a Nimrod as a boy, myself, and well I remembered the heated controversies as to whose charge of shot was responsible for some luckless bunny's demise.

The well was very deep, and my breath was coming fast by the time I had helped her wind the bucket-rope upon the windlass; but the water was cold as only spring-fed well water can be. As she poured it from the bucket it shone almost like foam in the moonlight, and seemed to whisper with a half-human voice, instead of gurgling as other water does when poured.

I had drunk water in nearly every quarter of the globe; but never such water as that. Cold as the breath from a glacier: limpid as visualized air, it was yet so light and tasteless in substance that only the chill in my throat and the sight of the liquid in the cup told me that I was doing more than going through the motions of drinking.

"And now, will you rest?" she invited, as I finished my third draught. "We've an extra chair on the porch for you."

Behind the screen of vines I found her father and mother seated in the rays of the big kitchen lamp. They were just as I had expected to find them; plain, homely, sincere country folk, courteous in their reception and anxious to make a sick stranger welcome. Both were stout, with the comfortable stoutness of middle age and good health; but both had surprisingly slender hands. I noticed, too, that the same characteristic of an over-long forefinger was apparent in their hands as in their daughter's, and that both their nails were trimmed to points and stained almost a brilliant red.

"My father, Mr. Squires;" the girl introduced, "and my mother, Mrs. Squires."

I could not repress a start. These people bore the very name I had casually thought to use when inquiring for some imaginary person. My lucky stars had surely guided me away from that attempt to scrape an acquaintance. What a figure I should have cut if I had actually asked for Mr. Squires!

Though I was not aware of it, my curious glance must have stayed longer on their reddened nails than I had intended, for Mrs. Squires looked deprecatingly at her hands. "We've all been turning in, putting up fox grapes"—she included her husband and daughter with a comprehensive gesture. "And the stain just won't wash out; has to wear off, you know."

I spent, perhaps, two hours with my new-found friends, talking of everything from the best methods of potato culture to the surest way of landing a nine-pound bass. All three joined in the conversation and took a lively interest in the topics under discussion. After the vapid talk of the guests at the sanitarium, I found the simple, interested discourse of these country people as stimulating as wine, and when I left them it was with a hearty promise to renew my call at an early date.

"Better wait until after dark," Mr. Squires warned. "We'd be glad to see you any time; but we're so busy these fall days, we haven't much time for company."

I took the broad hint in the same friendly spirit it was given.

It must have grown chillier than I realized while I sat there, for my new friends' hands were clay-cold when I took them in mine at parting.

Homeward bound, a whimsical thought struck me so suddenly I laughed aloud. There was something suggestive of the dog tribe about the Squires family, though I could not for the life of me say what it was. Even Mildred, the daughter, beautiful as she was, with her light eyes, her rather prominent nose and her somewhat wide mouth, reminded me in some vague way of a lovely silver collie I had owned as a boy.

I struck a tassel of dried leaves from a cluster of weeds with my walking stick as I smiled at the fanciful conceit. The legend of the werewolf—those horrible monsters, formed as men, but capable of assuming bestial shape at will, and killing and eating their fellows, was as old as mankind's fear of the dark, but no mythology I had ever read contained a reference to dog-people.

Strange fancies strike us in the moonlight, sometimes.

SEPTEMBER ripened to October, and the moon, which had been as round and bright as an exchange-worn coin when I first visited the Squires house, waned as thin as a shaving from a silversmith's lathe.

I became a regular caller at the house in the pines. Indeed, I grew to look forward to my nightly visits with those homely folk as a welcome relief from the tediously gay companionship of the oversophisticated people at the sanitarium.

My habit of slipping away shortly after dinner was the cause of considerable comment and no little speculation on the part of my fellow convalescents, some of whom set it down to the eccentricity which, to their minds, was the inevitable concomitant of a minister's vocation, while others were frankly curious. Snatches of conversation I overheard now and then led me to believe that the objective of my strolls was the subject of wagering, and the guarded questions put to me in an effort to solve the mystery became more and more annoying.

I had no intention of taking any of them to the farmhouse with me. The Squires were my friends. Their cheerful talk and unassuming manners were as delightful a contrast to the atmos-

phere of the sanitarium as a breath of mountain balsam after the fetid air of a hothouse; but to the city-centered crowd at Briarcliff they would have been only the objects of less than half scornful patronage, the source of pitying amusement.

It was Miss Leahy who pushed the impudent curiosity further than any of the rest, however. One evening, as I was setting out, she met me at the gate and announced her intention of going with me.

"You must have found something *dreadfully* attractive to take you off every evening this way, Mr. Weatherby," she hazarded as she pursed her rather pretty, rouged lips at me and caught step with my walk. "We girls really *can't* let some little country lass take you away from us, you know. We simply can't."

I made no reply. It was scarcely possible to tell a pretty girl, even such a vain little flirt as Sara Leahy, to go home and mind her business. Yet that was just what I wanted to do. But I would not take her with me; to that I made up my mind. I would stop at the turn of the road, just out of sight of the farmhouse, and cut across the fields. If she wanted to accompany me on a cross-country hike in high-heeled slippers, she was welcome to do so.

Besides, she would tell the others that my wanderings were nothing more mysterious than nocturnal explorations of the nearby woods; which bit of misinformation would satisfy the busybodies at Briarcliff and relieve me of the espionage to which I was subjected, as well.

I smiled grimly to myself as I pictured her climbing over fences and ditches in her flimsy party frock and beaded pumps, and lengthened my stride toward the woods at the road's turn.

We marched to the limits of the field bordering the Squires' grove in silence, I thinking of the mild revenge I should soon wreak upon the pretty little busybody at my side, Miss Leahy too intent on holding the pace I set to waste breath in conversation.

As we neared the woods she halted, an expression of worry, almost fear, coming over her face.

"I don't believe I'll go any farther," she announced.

"No?" I replied, a trifle sarcastically. "And is your curiosity so easily satisfied?"

"It's not that;" she turned half round, as if to retrace her steps, "I'm afraid of those woods."

"Indeed?" I queried. "And what is there to be afraid of? Bears, Indians, or wildcats? I've been through them several times without seeing anything terrifying." Now she had come this far, I was anxious to take her through the fields and underbrush.

"No-o," Miss Leahy answered, a nervous quaver in her voice, "I'm not afraid of anything like that; but—oh, I don't know what you call it. Pierre told me all about it the other day. Some kind of dreadful thing—loop—loop—something or other. It's a French word, and I can't remember it."

I was puzzled. Pierre Geronte was the ancient French-Canadian gardener at the sanitarium, and, like all doddering old men, would talk for hours to anyone who would listen. Also, like all *habitants*, he was full of the wild folklore his ancestors brought overseas with them generations ago.

"What did Pierre tell you?" I asked.

"Why, he said that years ago some terrible people lived in these woods. They had the only house for miles 'round; and travelers stopped there for the night, sometimes. But no stranger was ever seen to leave that place, once he went in. One night the farmers gathered about the house and burned it, with the family that lived there. When the embers had cooled down they made a search, and found nearly a dozen bodies buried in the cellar. That was why no one ever came away from that dreadful place.

"They took the murdered men to the cemetery and buried them; but they dumped the charred bodies of the murderers into graves in the barnyard, without even saying a prayer over them. And Pierre says—Oh, Look! *Look!*"

She broke off her recital of the old fellow's story, and pointed a trembling hand across the field to the edge of the woods. A second more and she shrank against me, clutching at my coat with fear-stiffened fingers and crying with excitement and terror.

I looked in the direction she indicated, myself a little startled by the abject fear that had taken such sudden hold on her.

Something white and ungainly was running diagonally across the field from us, skirting the margin of the woods and making for the meadow that adjoined the sanitarium pasture. A second glance told me it was a sheep; probably one of the flock kept to supply our table with fresh meat.

I was laughing at the strength of the superstition that could make the girl see a figure of horror in an innocent mutton that had strayed away from its fellows and was scared out of its silly wits, when something else attracted my attention.

Loping along in the trail of the fleeing sheep, somewhat to the rear and a little to each side, were two other animals. At first glance they appeared to be a pair of large collies; but as I looked more intently, I saw that these animals were like nothing I had ever seen before. They were much larger than any collie—nearly as high as St. Bernards—yet shaped in a general way like Alaskan sledge-dogs—huskies.

The farther one was considerably the larger of the two, and ran with a slight limp, as if one of its hind paws had been injured. As nearly as I could tell in the indifferent light, they were a rusty brown color, very thick-haired and unkempt in appearance. But the strangest thing about them was the fact that both were tailless, which gave them a terrifyingly grotesque look.

As they ran, a third form, similar to the other two in shape, but smaller, slender as a greyhound, with much lighter hued fur, broke from the thicket of short brush edging the wood and took up the chase, emitting a series of short, sharp yelps.

"Sheep-killers," I murmured, half to myself. "Odd. I've never seen dogs like that before."

"They're not dogs," wailed Miss Leahy against my coat. "They're not dogs. Oh, Mr. Weatherby, let's go away. Please, please take me home."

She was rapidly becoming hysterical, and I had a difficult time with her on the trip back. She clung whimpering to me, and I had almost to carry her most of the way. By the time we reached the sanitarium, she was crying bitterly, shivering, as if with a chill, and went in without stopping to thank me for my assistance.

I turned and made for the Squires farm with all possible speed, hoping to get there before the family had gone to bed. But when I arrived the house was in darkness, and my knock at the door received no answer.

As I retraced my steps to the sanitarium I heard faintly, from the fields beyond the woods, the shrill, eerie cry of the sheep-killing dogs.

A TORRENT of rain held us marooned the next day. Miss Leahy was confined to her room, with a nurse in constant attendance and the house doctor making hourly calls. She was on the verge of a nervous collapse, he told me, crying with a persistence that bordered on hysteria, and responding to treatment very slowly.

An impromptu dance was organized in the great hall and half a dozen bridge tables set up in the library; but as I was

skilled in neither of these rainy day diversions, I put on a waterproof and patrolled the veranda for exercise.

On my third or fourth trip around the house I ran into old Geronte shuffling across the porch, wagging his head and muttering portentiously to himself.

"See here, Pierre," I accosted him, "what sort of nonsense have you been telling Miss Leahy about those pine woods down the South road?"

The old fellow regarded me unwinkingly with his beady eyes, wrinkling his age-yellowed forehead for all the world like an elderly baboon inspecting a new sort of edible. "*M'sieur* goes out alone much at nights, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he asked, at length.

"Yes, Monsieur goes out alone much at night," I echoed, "but what Monsieur particularly desires to know is what sort of tales you have been telling Mademoiselle Leahy. *Comprenez vous?*"

The network of wrinkles about his lips multiplied as he smiled enigmatically, regarding me askance from the corners of his eyes.

"*M'sieur* is *Anglaise,*" he replied. "He would not understand—or believe."

"Never mind what I'd believe," I retorted. "What is this story about murder and robbery being committed in those woods? Who were the murderers, and where did they live? *Hein?*"

For a few seconds he looked fixedly at me, chewing the cud of senility between his toothless gums, then, glancing carefully about, as if he feared being overheard, he tip-toed up to me and whispered:

"*M'sieur* mus' stay indoors these nights. W'en the moon, she shine, yes; w'en she not show her face, no. There are evil things abroad at the dark of the moon, *M'sieur.* Even las' night they keel t'ree of my bes' sheep. Remembair, *M'sieur,* the *loup-garou,* he is out when the moon hide her light."

And with that he turned and left me; nor could I get another word from him save his cryptic warning, "Remembair, *M'sieur;* the *loup-garou.* Remembair."

In spite of my annoyance, I could not get rid of the unpleasant sensation the old man's words left with me. "The *loup-garou* — werewolf — he had said, and to prove his goblin-wolf's presence, he had cited the death of his three sheep.

As I paced the rain-washed porch I thought of the scene I had witnessed the night before, when the sheep-killers were at their work.

"Well," I reflected, "I've seen the *loup-garou* on his native heath at last. From causes as slight as this, no doubt, the horrible legend of the werewolf had sprung. Time was when all France quaked at the sound of the *loup-garou's* hunting call and the bravest knights in Christendom trembled in their castles and crossed themselves fearfully because some renegade shepherd dog quested his prey in the night. On such a foundation are the legends of a people built.

Whistling a snatch from *Pinafore* and looking skyward in search of a patch of blue in the clouds, I felt a tug at my raincoat sleeve, such as a neglected terrier might give. It was Geronte again.

"*M'sieur,*" he began in the same mysterious whisper, "the *loup-garou* is a verity, certainly. I, myself, have nevair seen him—" he paused to bless himself—"but my cousin, Baptiste, was once pursued by him. Yes.

"It was near the shrine of the good Sainte Anne that Baptiste lived. One night he was sent to fetch the curé for a dying woman. They rode fast through the trees, the curé and my cousin Baptiste, for it was at the dark of the moon, and the evil forest folk were abroad. And as they galloped, there came a *loup-garou* from the woods, with eyes as bright as hell-fire. It followed hard, this tailless hound from the devil's kennel; but they reached the house before it, and the curé put his book, with the Holy Cross on its cover, at the doorstep. The *loup-garou* wailed under the windows like a child in pain until the sun rose; then it slunk back to the forest.

"When my cousin Baptiste and the curé came out, they found its hand marks in the soft earth around the door. Very like your hand, or mine, they were, *M'sieur,* save that the first finger was longer than the others."

"And did they find the *loup-garou?*" I asked, something of the old man's earnestness communicated to me.

"Yes, *M'sieur;* but of course," he replied gravely.

"T'ree weeks before a stranger, drowned in the river, had been buried without the office of the Church. W'en they opened his grave they found his finger nails as red as blood, and sharp. Then they knew. The good curé read the burial office over him, and the poor soul that had been snatched away in sin slept peacefully at last."

He looked quizzically at me, as if speculating whether to tell me more; then, apparently fearing I would laugh at his outburst of confidence, started away toward the kitchen.

"Well, what else, Pierre?" I asked, feeling he had more to say.

"*Non, non, non,*" he replied. "There is nothing more, *M'sieur.* I did but want *M'sieur* should know my own cousin, Baptiste Geronte, had seen the *loup-garou* with his very eyes."

"Hearsay evidence," I commented, as I went in to dinner.

DURING the rainy week that followed I chafed at my confinement like a privileged convict suddenly deprived of his liberties, and looked as wistfully down the South road as any prisoned gipsy ever gazed upon the open trail.

The quiet home circle at the farmhouse, the unforced conversation of the old folks, Mildred's sweet companionship, all beckoned me with an almost irresistible force. For in this period of enforced separation I discovered what I had dimly suspected for some time. I loved Mildred Squires. And, loving her, I longed to tell her of it.

No lad intent on visiting his first sweetheart ever urged his feet more eagerly than I when, the curtains of rain at last drawn up, I hastened toward the house at the turn of the road.

As I hoped, yet hardly dared expect, Mildred was standing at the gate to meet me as I rounded the curve, and I yearned toward her like a humming bird seeking its nest.

She must have read my heart in my eyes, for her greeting smile was as tender as a mother's as she bends above her babe.

"At last you have come, my friend," she said, putting out both hands in welcome. "I am very glad."

We walked silently up the path, her fingers still resting in mine, her face averted. At the steps she paused, a little embarrassment in her voice as she explained, "Father and mother are out; they have gone to a—meeting. But you will stay?"

"Surely," I acquiesced. And to myself I admitted my gratitude for this chance of Mildred's unalloyed company.

We talked but little that night. Mildred was strangely distrait, and, much as I longed to, I could not force a confession of my love from my lips. Once, in the midst of a long pause between our words, the cry of the sheep-killers came faintly to us, echoed across the fields and woods, and as the weird, shrill sound fell on our ears, she threw back her head, with something of the gesture of a hunting dog scenting its quarry.

Toward midnight she turned to me, a panic of fear having apparently laid hold of her.

"You must go," she exclaimed, rising and laying her hand on my shoulder.

"But your father and mother have not returned," I objected. "Won't you let me stay until they get back?"

"Oh, no, no;" she answered, her agitation increasing. "You must go at once—please." She increased her pressure

on my shoulder, almost as if to shove me from the porch.

Taken aback by her sudden desire to be rid of me, I was picking up my hat, when she uttered a stifled little scream and ran quickly to the edge of the porch, interposing herself between me and the yard. At the same moment I heard a muffled sound from the direction of the front gate, a sound like a growling and snarling of savage dogs.

I leaped forward, my first thought being that the sheep-killers I had seen the other night had strayed to the Squires place. Crazed with blood, I knew, they would be almost as dangerous to men as to sheep, and every nerve in my sickness-weakened body cried out to protect Mildred.

To my blank amazement, as I looked from the porch I beheld Mr. and Mrs. Squires walking sedately up the path, talking composedly together. There was no sign of the dogs or any other animals about.

As the elderly couple neared the porch I noticed that Mr. Squires walked with a pronounced limp, and that both their eyes shone very brightly in the moonlight, as though they were suffused with tears.

They greeted me pleasantly enough; but Mildred's anxiety seemed increased, rather than diminished, by their presence, and I took my leave after a brief exchange of civilities.

On my way back I looked intently in the woods bordering the road for some sign of the house of which Pierre had told Miss Leahy; but everywhere the pines grew as thickly as thought neither axe nor fire had ever disturbed them.

"Geronte is in his second childhood," I reflected, "and like an elder child, he loves to terrify his juniors with fearsome witch-tales."

Yet an uncomfortable feeling was with me till I saw the gleam of the sanitarium's lights across the fields; and as I walked toward them it seemed to me that more than once I heard the baying of the sheep-killers in the woods behind me.

A BUZZ of conversation, like the sibilant arguments of a cloud of swarming bees, greeted me as I descended the stairs to breakfast next morning.

It appeared that Ned, one of the pair of great mastiffs attached to the sanitarium, had been found dead before his kennel, his throat and brisket torn open and several gaping wounds in his flanks. Boris, his fellow, had been discovered whimpering and trembling in the extreme corner of the dog house, the embodiment of canine terror.

Speculation as to the animal responsible for the outrage was rife, and, as usual, it ran the gamut of possible and impossible surmises. Every sort of beast from a grizzly bear to a lion escaped from the circus was in turn indicted for the crime, only to have a complete alibi straightway established.

The only one having no suggestion to offer was old Geronte, who stood Sphinx-like in the outskirts of the crowd, smiling sardonically to himself and wagging his head sagely. As he caught sight of me he nodded sapiently, as if to include me in the joint tenancy to some weighty secret.

Presently he worked his way through the chattering group and whispered, "*M'seiur,* he was here last night—and with him was the other tailless one. Come and see."

Plucking me by the sleeve, he led me to the rear of the kennels, and, stooping, pointed to something in the moist earth. "You see?" he asked, as if a printed volume lay for my reading in the mud.

"I see that someone has been on his hands and knees here," I answered, inspecting the hand prints he indicated.

"*Something,*" he corrected, as if reasoning with an obstinate child. "Does not *M'sieur* behol' that the first finger is the longest?"

"Which proves nothing," I defended. "There are many hands like that."

"Oh—yes?" he replied with that queer upward accent of his. "And where has *M'sieur* seen hands like that before?"

"Oh, many times," I assured him somewhat vaguely, for there was a catch at the back of my throat as I spoke. Try as I would, I could recall only three pairs of hands with that peculiarity.

His little black eyes rested steadily on me in an unwinking stare, and the corners of his mouth curved upward in a malicious grin. It seemed, almost, as if he found a grim pleasure in thus driving me into a corner.

"See here, Pierre," I began testily, equally annoyed at myself and him, "you know as well as I that the *loup-garou* is an old woman's tale. Someone was looking here for tracks, and left his own while doing it. If we look among the patients here we shall undoubtedly find a pair of hands to match these prints."

"God forbid!" he exclaimed, crossing himself. "That would be an evil day for us, *M'sieur.*

"Here, Bor-ees," he snapped his fingers to the surviving mastiff, "come and eat."

The huge beast came wallowing over to him with the ungainly gait of all heavily-muscled animals, stopping on his way to make a nasal investigation of my knees. Scarcely had his nose come into contact with my trousers when he leaped back, every hair in his mane and along his spine stiffly erect, every tooth in his great mouth bared in a savage snarl. But instead of the mastiff's fighting growl, he emitted only a low, frightened whine, as though he were facing some animal of greater power than himself, and knew his own weakness.

"Good heavens!" I cried, thoroughly terrified at the friendly brute's sudden hostility.

"Yes, *M'sieur,*" Geronte cut in quickly, putting his hand on the dog's collar and leading him a few paces away. "It is well you should call upon the heavenly ones; for surely you have the odor of hell upon your clothes."

"What do you mean?" I demanded angrily. "How dare you—?"

He raised a thin hand deprecatingly. "*M'sieur* knows that he knows;" he replied evenly, "and what I, also know."

And leading Boris by the collar, he shuffled to the house.

MILDRED was waiting for me at the gate that evening, and again her father and mother were absent at one of their meetings.

We walked silently up the path and seated ourselves on the porch steps, where the waning moon cast oblique rays through the pine branches.

I think Mildred felt the tension I was drawn to, for she talked trivialities with an almost feverish earnestness, stringing her sentences together, and changing her subjects as a Navajo rug weaver twists and breaks her threads.

At last I found an opening in the abattis of her small talk.

"Mildred," I said, very simply, for great emotions tear the ornaments from our speech, "I love you, and I want you for my wife. Will you marry me, Mildred?" I laid my hand on hers. It was cold as lifeless flesh, and seemed to shrink beneath my touch.

"Surely, dear, you must have read the love in my eyes," I urged, as she averted her face in silence. "Almost from the night I first saw you, I've loved you, dear. I—"

"O-o-h, don't" her interruption was a strangled moan, as if wrung from her by my words.

I leaned nearer her. "Don't you love me, Mildred?" I asked. As yet she had not denied it.

For a moment she trembled, as if a sudden chill had come on her, then, leaning to me, she clasped my shoulders

in her arms, hiding her face against my jacket.

"John, John, you don't know what you say," she whispered disjointedly, as though a sob had torn the words before they left her lips. Her breath was on my cheek, moist and cold as air from a vault.

I could feel the litheness of her through the thin stuff of her gown, and her body was as devoid of warmth as a dead thing.

"You're cold," I told her, putting my arms shieldingly about her. "The night has chilled you."

A convulsive sob was her only answer.

"Mildred," I began again, putting my hand beneath her chin and lifting her face to mine, "tell me, dear, what is the matter?" I lowered my lips to hers.

With a cry that was half scream, half weeping, she thrust me suddenly from her, pressing her hands against my breast and lowering her head until her face was hidden between her outstretched arms. I, too, started back, for in the instant our lips were about to meet, hers had writhed back from her teeth, like a dog's when he is about to spring, and a low, harsh noise, almost a growl, had risen in her throat.

"For God's sake," she whispered hoarsely, agony in every note of her shaking voice, "never do that again! Oh, my dear, dear love, you don't know how near to a horror worse than death you were."

"A — horror — worse — than — death?" I echoed dully, pressing her cold little hands in mine. "What do you mean, Mildred?"

"Loose my hands," she commanded with a quaint reversion to the speech of our ancestors, "and hear me.

"I do love you. I love you better than life. Better than death. I love you so I have overcome something stronger than the walls of the grave for your sake; but John, my very love, this is our last night together. We can never meet again. You must go, now, and not come back until tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning?" I repeated blankly. What wild talk was this?

Heedless of my interruption, she hurried on. "Tomorrow morning, just before the sun rises over those trees, you must be here, and have your prayer book with you."

I listened speechless, wondering which of us was mad.

"By that corncrib there," she waved a directing hand, "you will find three mounds. Stand beside them and read the office for the burial of the dead. Come quickly, and pause for nothing on the way. Look back for nothing; heed no sound from behind you. And for your own safety, come no sooner than to allow yourself the barest time to read your office."

Bewildered, I attempted to reason with the mad woman; begged her to explain this folly; but she refused all answer to my fervid queries, nor would she suffer me to touch her.

Finally, I rose to go. "You will do what I ask?" she implored.

"Certainly not," I answered firmly.

"John, John, have pity!" she cried, flinging herself to the earth before me and clasping my knees. "You say you love me. I only ask this one favor of you; only this. Please, for my sake, for the peace of the dead and the safety of the living, promise you will do this thing for me."

Shaken by her abject supplication, I promised, though I felt myself a figure in some grotesque nightmare as I did it.

"Oh, my love, my precious love," she wept, rising and taking both my hands. "At last I shall have peace, and you shall bring it to me.

"No," she forbade as I made to take her in my arms at parting. "The most I can give you, dear, is this," she held her icy hands against my lips. "It seems so little, dear; but oh! it is so much."

Like a drunkard in his cups I staggered along the South road, my thoughts gone wild with the strangeness of the play I had just acted.

Across the clearing came the howls of the sheep-killers, a sound I had grown used to of late. But tonight there was a deeper, fiercer *timbre* in their bay; a note that boded ill for man as well as beast. Louder and louder it swelled; it was rising from the field itself, now, drawing nearer and nearer the road.

I turned and looked. The great beasts I had seen pursuing the luckless sheep the other night were galloping toward me. A cold finger seemed traced down my spine; the scalp crept and tingled beneath my cap. There was no other object of their quest in sight. I was their elected prey.

My first thought was to turn and run; but a second's reasoning told me this was worse than useless. Weakened with long illness, with an uphill road to the nearest shelter, I should soon be run down.

No friendly tree offered asylum; my only hope was to stand and fight. Grasping my stick, I spread my feet, bracing myself against their charge.

And as I waited their onslaught, there came from the shadow of the pines the shriller, sharper cry of the third beast. Like the crest of a flying, windlashed wave, the slighter, silver-furred brute came speeding across the meadow, its ears laid back, its slender paws spurning the sod daintily. Almost, it seemed, as if the pale shadow of a cloud were racing toward me.

The thing dashed slantwise across the field, its flight converging on the line of the other two's attack. Midway between me and them it paused; hairs bristling, limbs bent for a spring.

My eyes went wide with incredulity. It was standing in my defense.

All the savageness of the larger beasts' hunting cry was echoed in the smaller creature's bay, and with it a defiance that needed no interpretation.

The attackers paused in their rush; halted, and looked speculatively at my ally. They took a few tentative steps in my direction; and a fierce whine, almost an articulate curse, went up from the silver-haired beast. Slowly the tawny pair circled and trotted back to the woods.

I hurried toward the sanitarium, grasping my stick firmly in readiness for another attack.

But no further cries came from the woods, and once, as I glanced back, I saw the light-haired beast trotting slowly in my wake, looking from right to left, as if to ward off danger.

Half an hour later I looked from my window toward the house in the pines. Far down the south road, its muzzle pointed to the moon, the bright-furred animal crouched and poured out a lament to the night. And its cry was like the wail of a child in pain.

FAR into the night I paced my room, like a condemned convict when the vigil of the death watch is on him. Reason and memory struggled for the mastery; one urging me to give over my wild act, the other bidding me obey my promise to Mildred.

Toward morning I dropped into a chair, exhausted with my objectless marching. I must have fallen asleep, for when I started up the stars were dimming in the zenith, and bands of slate, shading to amethyst slanted across the horizon.

A moment I paused, laughing cynically at my fool's errand, then, seizing cap and book, I bolted down the stairs, and ran through the paling dawn to the house in the pines.

There was something ominous and terrifying in the two-toned pastel of the house that morning. Its windows stared at me with blank malevolence, like the half-closed eyes of one stricken dead in mortal sin. The little patches of hoarfrost on the lawn were like leprous spots on some unclean thing. From the trees

behind the clearing an owl hooted mournfully, as if to say, "Beware, beware!" and the wind soughing through the black pine boughs echoed the refrain ceaselessly.

Three mounds, sunken and weed-grown, lay in the unkempt thicket behind the corncrib. I paused beside them, throwing off my cap and adjusting my stole hastily. Thumbing the pages to the committal service, I held the book close, that I might see the print through the morning shadows, and commenced: "I know that my redeemer liveth. . ."

Almost beside me, under the branches of the pines, there rose such a chorus of howls and yelps I nearly dropped my book. Like all the hounds in the kennels of hell, the sheep-killers clamored at me, rage and fear and mortal hatred in their cries. Through the bestial cadences, too, there seemed to run a human note; the sound of voices heard before beneath these very trees. Deep and throaty, and raging mad, two of the voices came to me, and, like the tremolo of a violin lightly played in an orchestra of brass, the shriller cry of a third beast sounded.

As the infernal hubbub rose at my back, I half turned to fly. Next instant I grasped my book more firmly and resumed my office, for like a beacon in the dark, Mildred's words flashed on my memory: *"Look back for nothing; heed no sound behind you."*

Strangely, too, the din approached no nearer; but as though held by an invisible bar, stayed at the boundary of the clearing.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. . . deliver us from all our offenses. . . O, Lord, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death. . ." and to such an accompaniment, surely, as no priest ever before chanted the office, I pressed through the brief service to the final *Amen.*

Tiny grouts of moisture stood out on my forehead, my breath struggled in my throat as I gasped out the last word. My nerves were frayed to shreds and my strength nearly gone as I let fall my book, and turned upon the beasts among the trees.

They were gone. Abruptly as it had begun, their clamor stopped, and only the rotting pine needles, lightly gilded by the morning sun, met my gaze. A light touch fell in the palm of my open hand, as if a pair of cool, sweet lips had laid a kiss there.

A vapor like swamp-fog enveloped me. The outbuildings, the old, stone-curbed well where I had drunk the night I first saw Mildred, the house itself—all seemed fading into mist and swirling away in the morning breeze.

"EH, EH, EH; but *M'sieur* will do himself an injury, sleeping on the wet earth!" Old Geronte bent over me, his arm beneath my shoulders. Behind him, great Boris, the mastiff, stood wagging his tail, regarding me with doggish good humor.

"Pierre," I muttered thickly, "how came you here?"

"This morning, going to my tasks, I saw *M'sieur* run down the road like a thing pursued. I followed quickly, for the woods hold terrors in the dark, *M'sieur.*"

I looked toward the farmhouse. Only a pair of chimneys, rising stark and bare from a crumbling foundation were there. Fence, well, barn—all were gone, and in their place a thicket of sumac and briars, tangled and overgrown as though undisturbed for thirty years.

"The house, Pierre! Where is the house?" I croaked, sinking my fingers into his withered arm.

" 'ouse?" he echoed. "Oh, but of course. There is no 'ouse here, M'sieur; nor has there been for years. This is an evil place, M'sieur; it is best we quit it, and that quickly. There be evil things that run by night—"

"No more," I answered, staggering toward the road, leaning heavily on him. "I brought them peace, Pierre."

He looked dubiously at the English prayer book I held. A Protestant clergyman is a thing of doubtful usefulness to the orthodox French-Canadian. Something of the heartsick misery in my face must have touched his kind old heart, for at last he relented, shaking his head pityingly and patting my shoulder gently, as one would soothe a sorrowing child.

"Per'aps, *M'sieur,*" he conceded. "Per'aps; who shall say no? Love and sorrow are the purchase price of peace. Yes. Did not *le bon Dieu* so buy the peace of the world?"

Sight Without Eyes

A FRENCH scientist named Louis Farigoule says that human beings have latent within them the power to see without eyes. This alleged power is termed paroptic vision.

After exhaustive experiments, Farigoule has written a book on the subject in which he states that man has a "paroptic sense" that is capable of communicating to the brain cognizance of the existence of surrounding objects practically identical with the effect of ordinary vision. His claim is that any part of the bodily exterior may be capable of paroptic vision under certain conditions.

Other experimenters who have taken up the work claim to have attained similar results. They state their belief that paroptic vision is a natural faculty and that light is the agent that produces paroptic vision. They also claim that variations in the intensity of light produce the same effects as they do in ordinary vision and that neither touch nor any of the other senses has anything to do with paroptic vision.

When the tests were made, precautions were taken which eliminated all possibility of any use of the eyes, yet the subjects were able to perceive and name objects with absolute precision.

Genoese Riviera Damaged by Waterspout

A GIGANTIC waterspout struck the Genoese Riviera a short time ago, injuring many people and doing untold damage. Sestri, Pegli, Gornigliano and San Pier d'Arena were the principal places affected. The storm, which lasted nearly an hour, unroofed the Ansaldo Pig Iron Works at Pegli and many persons were injured by falling tiles. The damage to the Ansalado Depot at San Pier d'Arena was estimated at 100,000 lire and many victims of the storm were taken to hospitals. Electric power lines were torn down and bathing establishments and trees for a half mile along the coast were cut away. It is said that, at one point, a brick house was leveled to the ground.

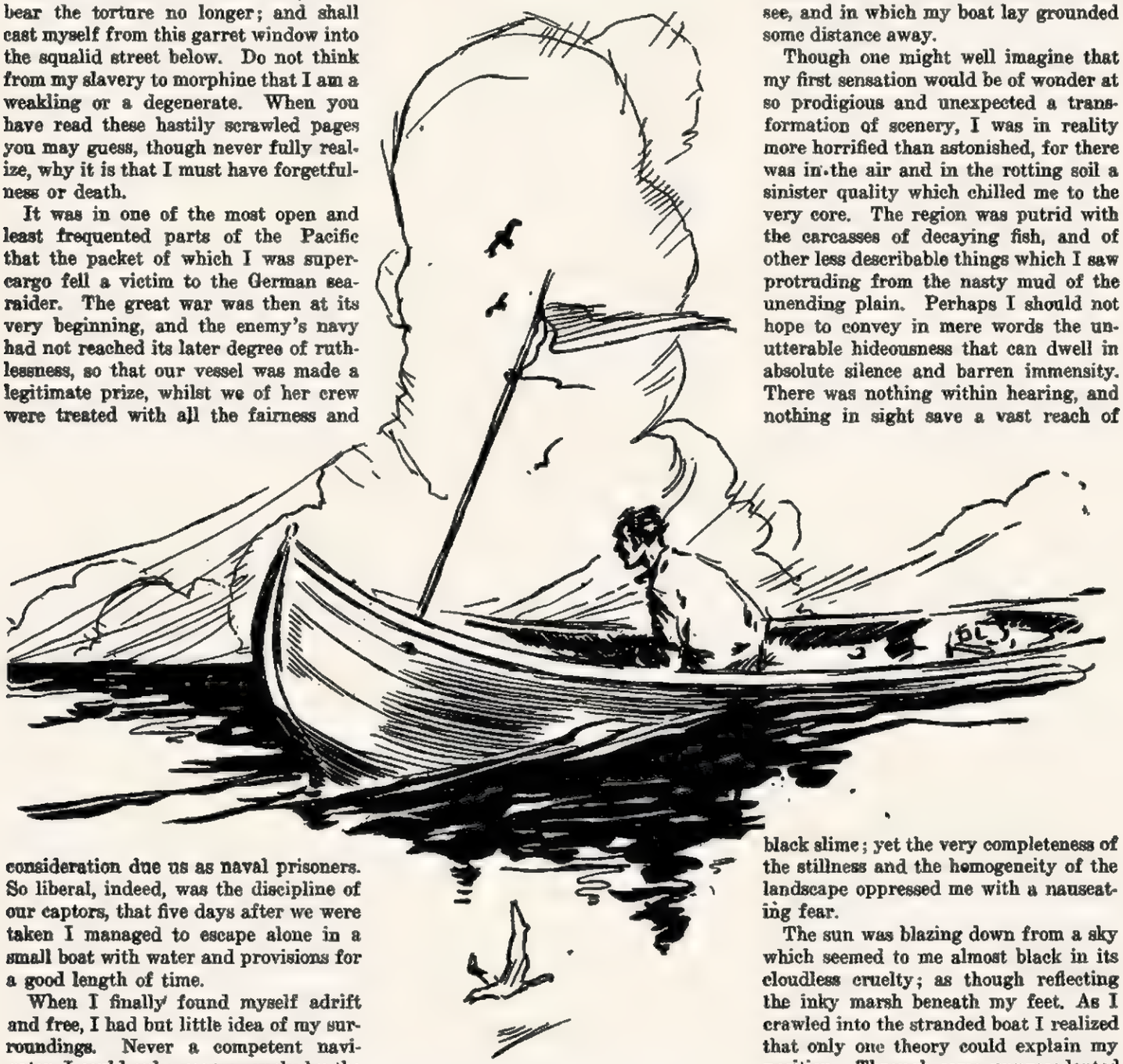
H. P. LOVECRAFT, Master of Weird Fiction, Has Something Unusual To Say in

DAGON

I AM writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless, and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below. Do not think from my slavery to morphine that I am a weakling or a degenerate. When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realize, why it is that I must have forgetfulness or death.

It was in one of the most open and least frequented parts of the Pacific that the packet of which I was supercargo fell a victim to the German sea-raider. The great war was then at its very beginning, and the enemy's navy had not reached its later degree of ruthlessness, so that our vessel was made a legitimate prize, whilst we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners. So liberal, indeed, was the discipline of our captors, that five days after we were taken I managed to escape alone in a small boat with water and provisions for a good length of time.

When I finally found myself adrift and free, I had but little idea of my surroundings. Never a competent navigator, I could only guess vaguely by the sun and stars that I was somewhat south of the equator. Of the longitude I knew nothing, and no island or coast-line was in sight. The weather kept fair, and for uncounted days I drifted aimlessly beneath the scorching sun; waiting either for some passing ship, or to be cast on the shores of some habitable land. But neither ship nor land appeared, and I began to despair in my solitude upon the heaving vastnesses of unbroken blue.



The change happened whilst I slept. Its details I shall never know; for my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous. When at last I awaked, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance away.

Though one might well imagine that my first sensation would be of wonder at so prodigious and unexpected a transformation of scenery, I was in reality more horrified than astonished, for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain. Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute silence and barren immensity. There was nothing within hearing, and nothing in sight save a vast reach of black slime; yet the very completeness of the stillness and the homogeneity of the landscape oppressed me with a nauseating fear.

The sun was blazing down from a sky which seemed to me almost black in its cloudless cruelty; as though reflecting the inky marsh beneath my feet. As I crawled into the stranded boat I realized that only one theory could explain my position. Through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery

depths. So great was the extent of the new land which had risen under me, that I could not detect the faintest noise of the surging ocean, strain my ears as I might. Nor were there any sea-fowl to prey upon the dead things.

For several hours I sat thinking or brooding in the boat, which lay upon its side and afforded a slight shade as the sun moved across the heavens. As the day progressed, the ground lost some of its stickiness, and seemed likely to dry sufficiently for traveling purposes in a short time. That night I slept but little, and the next day I made for myself a pack containing food and water, preparatory to an overland journey in search of the vanished sea and possible rescue.

On the third morning I found the soil dry enough to walk upon with ease. The odor of the fish was maddening; but I was too much concerned with graver things to mind so slight an evil, and set out boldly for an unknown goal. All day I forged steadily westward, guided by a far-away hummock which rose higher than any other elevation on the rolling desert. That night I camped, and on the following day still traveled toward the hummock, though that object seemed scarcely nearer than when I had first spied it. By the fourth evening I attained the base of the mound, which turned out to be much higher than it had appeared from a distance; an intervening valley setting it out in sharper relief from the general surface. Too weary to ascend, I slept in the shadow of the hill.

I do not know why my dreams were so wild that night, but before the waning and fantastically gibbous moon had risen far above the eastern plain, I was awake in a cold perspiration, determined to sleep no more. Such visions as I had experienced were too much for me to endure again. And in the glow of the moon I saw how unwise I had been to travel by day. Without the glare of the parching sun, my journey would have cost me less energy; indeed, I now felt quite able to perform the ascent which had deterred me at sunset. Picking up my pack, I started for the crest of the eminence.

I HAVE said that the unbroken monotony of the rolling plain was a source of vague horror to me; but I think my horror was greater when I gained the summit of the mound and looked down the other side into an immeasurable pit or canyon, whose black recesses the moon had not yet soared high enough to illumine. I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of Paradise Lost, and of Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.

As the moon climbed higher in the sky, I began to see that the slopes of the valley were not quite so perpendicular as I had imagined. Ledges and outcroppings of rock afforded fairly easy footholds for a descent, whilst after a drop of a few hundred feet, the declivity became very gradual. Urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely analyze, I scrambled with difficulty down the rocks and stood on the gentler slope beneath, gazing into the Stygian deeps where no light had yet penetrated.

All at once my attention was captured by a vast and singular object on the opposite slope, which rose steeply about a hundred yards ahead of me; an object that gleamed whitely in the newly bestowed rays of the ascending moon. That it was merely a gigantic piece of stone, I soon assured myself; but I was conscious of a distinct impression that its contour and position were not altogether the work of Nature. A closer scrutiny filled me with sensations I cannot express; for despite its enormous magnitude, and its location in an abyss which had yawned at the bottom of the sea since the world was young, I perceived beyond a doubt that the strange object was a well-shaped monolith whose massive bulk had know the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures.

Dazed and frightened, yet not without a certain thrill of the scientist's or archaeologist's delight, I examined my surroundings more closely. The moon, now near the zenith, shone weirdly and vividly above the towering steeps that hemmed in the chasm, and revealed the fact that a far-flung body of water flowed at the bottom, winding out of sight in both directions, and almost lapping my feet as I stood on the slope.

Across the chasm, the wavelets washed the base of the Cyclopean monolith; on whose surface I could now trace both inscriptions and crude sculptures. The writing was in a system of hieroglyphics unknown to me, and unlike anything I had ever seen in books; consisting for the most part of conventionalized aquatic symbols such as fishes, eels, octopi, crustaceans, molluscs, whales, and the like. Several characters obviously represented marine things which are unknown to the modern world, but whose decomposing forms I had observed on the ocean-risen plain.

It was the pictorial carving, however, that did most to hold me spellbound. Plainly visible across the intervening water on account of their enormous size, were an array of bas-reliefs whose subjects would have excited the envy of a Doré. I think that these things were supposed to depict men—at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shown disporting like fishes in the waters of some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint. Grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or a Bulwer, they were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall. Curiously enough, they seemed to have been chiseled badly out of proportion with their scenic background; for one of the creatures was shown in the act of killing a whale represented as but little larger than himself.

I remarked, as I say, their grotesqueness and strange size; but in a moment decided that they were merely the imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe; some tribe whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown or Neanderthal man was born. Awestruck at this unexpected glimpse into a past beyond the conception of the most daring anthropologist, I stood musing, whilst the moon cast queer reflections on the silent channel before me.

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemuslike, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmare to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.

Of my frantic ascent of the slope and cliff, and of my delirious journey back to the stranded boat, I remember little. I believe I sang a great deal, and laughed oddly when I was unable to sing. I have indistinct recollections of a great storm some time after I reached the boat; at any rate, I know that I heard peals of thunder and other tones which Nature utters only in wild and terrible moods.

WHEN I came out of the shadows I was in a San Francisco hospital; brought thither by the captain of the American ship which had picked up my boat in mid-ocean. In my delirium I had said much, but found that my words had been given scant attention. Of any land

upheaval in the Pacific, my rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but, soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my inquiries.

It is at night, especially when the moon is gibbous and waning, that I see the thing. I tried morphine, but the drug has given only transient surcease, and has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave. So now I am going to end matters, having written a full account for the information or the contemptuous amusement of my fellow-men. Often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm—a mere freak of fever as I lay sun-stricken and raving in the open boat after my escape from the German man-of-war.

This I ask myself, but ever does there come before me a hideously vivid vision in reply. I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind—of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, *that hand!* The window! The window!

This is the First of a Series of Remarkable Stories that H. P. LOVECRAFT is Writing for WEIRD TALES. The Second Will Appear in an Early Issue

The Hero of This Story Had a Beautiful Dream and a Rude Awakening

THE MAN WHO OWNED THE WORLD

By FRANK OWEN

I MET John Rust by chance one evening in a by-street near Greenwich Village.

It was a miserable night, the air was extremely cold, and a choppy wind kept blowing against my face as though resentful of my presence. And now it commenced to rain, not sufficiently heavy to drive one from the street, yet disagreeable enough to make everything clammy and dismal.

But, despite the dreariness of the night, I loitered for a moment before a jewelry store window, probably because I simply cannot pass a window containing gems or pottery or old vases without pausing a moment. There was nothing in the window worthy of recounting, just a heterogeneous assortment of cheap rings, bracelets and gaudy beads almost valueless. Nevertheless, I tarried, and then it was that someone grabbed me by the arm, and as I turned around, the jewelry window, the storm, the cold, all were forgotten, for I was gazing into the face of John Rust.

He was so thin that the skin of his face seemed drawn over the raw bones without any intervening layer of flesh. His face was absolutely colorless, even his lips were blue-white. He had a straggly beard, yellow and vile-looking. Even without the enormous shapeless mouth and toothless gums, the beard was sufficient to make the face repulsive.

But it was the unnatural, fanatical light in his eyes which impressed itself most clearly on the screen of my memory. It was not human, but a glow such as might appear in the eyes of a maniac or a wild animal. His costume seemed made up of stray bits from the clothes of all the tramps of earth. And yet he carried a cane and kept swinging it about jauntily as though it were a thing of vast importance.

"You call those jewels!" he cried harshly in a voice made of falsetto notes. "Why, those are not even fit to be thrown to the swine which grovel in a thousand pens more than a mile from my castle. Come with me and I will show you gems more wondrous than the Crown Jewels of Old Russia, more gorgeous than the collection of Cleopatra and more luxurious than the famed necklace of Helen of Troy. After you see my jewels you will laugh at what is obviously but a collection of baubles."

On the impulse of the moment, I said, "I will go with you, but before we go, I suggest that we have a bite to eat. You look hungry."

He shrugged his shoulders. "This day," he cried, "have I drunk three pearls melted in golden goblets of rarest wine. But if you wish to eat, I will go with you. All the restaurants near here are mine."

So we went to Messimo's Chop House and ate, but what we ate I cannot recall. As we passed out, John Rust grew quite angry because I paid the check.

"That was foolish," he stormed, "for did I not tell you I owned the restaurant. Tonight I want you to be my guest."

He led the way through a labyrinth of alleys and narrow streets.

"I live apart from the howling mobs," he told me, "so that my sleep will not be disturbed. Each morn I am awakened by a lad as lovely as Narcissus who plays an anthem of the Sun on a harp wrought of gold and platinum and set with a hundred and thirty-three pink diamonds. At the top of the harp is a single square blue diamond of forty carats, the finest in the world. It represents the Morning Star. The strings of the harp are the rays of the sun. The pink diamonds represent the individual kingdoms over which I reign."

As he spoke, we came to a hole in the ground, a filthy ancient cellar. I must confess that I had a twinge of terror as I followed John Rust down a flight of slippery stone steps, more treacherous and steep than the facade of Gibraltar.

Something, I know not what, scampered across my feet and went screeching off into the blackness which engulfed us like the shadows in a tomb of recent death. I could hear John Rust fumbling about, and after an eternity of waiting, he struck a match and lighted a candle. As he did so, he cried:

"Behold, my treasure-chamber!"

By the dim light of the candle which made the silhouette of John Rust dance on the wall like the capering of a fiend, I glanced about me. The cellar was absolutely unfurnished, unless the cobwebs of a century can be classed as drapery. Down the stone steps the night rain dripped monotonously.

"Look!" fairly shrieked John Rust, "look at these diamonds, sapphires, carved jades, rare corals, tourmalenes, emeralds and gorgeous lapis lazuli! Has ever mortal man gazed on a finer collection than this? Here is more wealth than even Midas dreamed of. The Gaekwar of Baroda by comparison to me is without jewels; the Dalai Llama of Tibet is a pauper when the light of my wealth shines upon him. All the treasures of Rome are insignificant when held parallel to mine. The Incas of Peru owned less than I divide in a single year among the poor!"

He clutched at the bits of ashes, coal and pebbles which were falling through his fingers, the wealth which the Gods had lavished on him so prodigiously.

"Tell me," he cried hoarsely, "are your eyes not blinded by the brilliance of my stones?"

"My surprise at what you tell me is acute," I declared truthfully. "I can scarcely find words to express my thoughts."

"Don't try," said John Rust grandly. "The greatest rhetoricians the world has ever known have never invented words even to suggest their true magnificence. . . . . Nor is this treasure all I possess. I *own* the world! Every castle of Rome or Venice is mine; every pasture of England, every moor of Scotland, every city in America, I own. Come," he ended abruptly, "come with me, and I will show you my private bath, a pool such as Mark Antony or the mighty Caesar never dreamed of."

It must be confessed that I sighed with relief as he led the way up the worn stone steps again. It was good to be out in the open air once more even though it was raining as heavily as when Noah set sail.

John Rust led the way back to Washington Square, to the fountain in the center of the park.

"This," he explained, "is my bath, shaded by myrtle trees and palms and in the heart of a grove where ten thousand song birds sing. Among the seven wonders of the world is nothing to equal this. I am better than Monte Cristo, for whereas he only boasted when he exclaimed, 'The world is mine!' I can *prove* my claim to it."

DURING the days that followed, I met John Rust several times, and although I cannot say that he remembered me, he nevertheless talked to me, which was really all he desired. He believed that all the people in the great city were his slaves and this misconception was the direct cause of his undoing.

While his eccentricities flowed in a harmless channel he was unmolested, but one day he struck one of his subjects with his sceptor. The sceptor was a strong oak cudgel and the subject in question was a huge, stalwart ice-man who strenuously objected to being disciplined. He raised such a din that two policemen were necessary to quell his personal riot.

After chaos had ended, the ice-man continued on his rounds, but John Rust was detained until the police-patrol arrived. He believed it was a chariot of gold, that the crowd gathered around had come to envy Caesar, and so he climbed in as majestically as though he were about to proceed to the Coliseum as the supreme guest of the populace on a fete day.

In the course of weeks a great brain specialist, because he was interested in the case, examined John Rust and asserted that he could be successfully normalized by a simple operation. He went on to explain about the pressure of a bone on some vital spot in the brain, the removal of which would insure the return of rationality.

The operation was successfully performed and eventually John Rust was turned out of the hospital a withered, broken old man, entirely cured.

He went back to his cellar. The first thing he intended doing was to sell his jewels and deposit the money in a reliable bank, for he still retained the memory of his jewels, although the hallucination that he owned the world was entirely blotted out of his memory.

So he returned to his cellar only to find heaps of worthless stones and ashes. He shrieked in his anguish. He had been robbed of all his jewels! For a moment it seemed doubtful that his new-found sanity could stand the surging flood of his ravings. All his enormous wealth had vanished like the essence of a dream. Now life contained nothing for him. He had neither relatives nor friends. He had lived in his dungeon for more than ten years. No one knew from whence he had come. For hours he sat, perhaps even days, moaning and wailing as awfully as any woman for a lost child.

Months later they found him dead one morning in his cellar, lying face downward in the ashes. He had died of grief, in abject poverty, this man who once had owned the world and had ten million slaves.

A Tragic Story, Powerfully Told

GREY SLEEP

By CHARLES HORN

TIMES there were in her married life when Meta Hansen asked for death. Not many times, true, but each one stood out terrifically, even after she believed she had made herself over.

Worst of all of these were the days following the death of her firstborn, a boy, and the days following the death of her lastborn, a girl. After these were the times when David, her husband, had found her pets, the two white rats, where she had hidden them in the shed back of the house. David had held her off and watched coldly while the fat grey cat caught the rats, one after the other. (The cat was the property of a neighbor.)

Last of all of her petitions for death came, it seemed, when David tipped into the yard the two geranium plants that for a day had decked the side window of the little living room. David crushed the red blossoms under his heel.

"Foolishness! Soft foolishness!" he growled, both when disposing of the white rats and the red flowers. "A woman ain't got no time for them things. A woman has her work to do."

The most terrific death, then, Meta would have kissed as it came to her.

All these occurrences came to pass in the first five years of her married life, and looking back frequently—but more infrequently—she had asked questions. Had these times taken something out of her? Had they deadened her passionate longing for love? Had these cruelties—twice at the hands of her husband and twice at the hands of her God—made her reconciled to life?

She believed they had. For more than fifteen years she had taught herself that she must bend every nerve of her body, every thought of her consciousness, every impulse of her hours, to David, and as he willed. His actions had taught her that she must not be soft; that she must not disturb him with caresses; that she must not interrupt his hours with chatter; that she must not have impulses of affection, except as he willed and at his command. Her life became a series of "must nots."

Months after the death of her last child, with her eyes on a yellow-haired, lusty, three-year-old boy, Meta timidly suggested an adoption. Her arms were aching, her bosoms lifting and pulling with the great yearning each time she saw the child. Her mother-heart, starved for love, hungered for him. He would bring the great completeness to her hours. And they could get this child. Tentatively she had arranged this. Timidly she carried the question to David.

"Talk not to me of other people's brats!" he roared. "Why should we take things that ain't for us?"

Then, after a long silence, and just as her lips trembled on the edge of another plea:

"If you can't raise kids of your own —if you ain't got it in you to have kids that'll live—talk not to me of other people's brats."

And he turned to his evening paper. Meta was silenced.

This was the way of it: "Your kids died. You couldn't raise your own." Never "our daughter" or "our son," but "*your* kids." Had they lived, and had they been credits, Meta knew he would have claimed them. Had they lived, and had they been discredits, they would have been *her* children, wholly hers. . . . Even as in death they were hers.

A slave to great love was Meta. It had come into her with the first breath of life; she had taken it with the milk from her mother's breast. It had filled the home of her girlhood—even now tears came to her eyes when she remembered the adoration of her father for her mother—and she carried it full-visioned into her marriage with David. She worshipped her man. She it would be, she believed, who would wait upon him, labor for him, suffer for him; be his right and left hand; mend his garments, wash them, lay them out neatly for him; run to his bidding, sit with him in the evenings—talking, laughing, dreaming, loving—*loving!* Riding pink clouds in a sea of roses.

David desired none of these. He forbade them. He was a hard man.

"When I want you I'll call you," he rasped, many times. "Don't baby me. I ain't that kind. Don't bother me. Don't ask questions. When I want you, you'll know it. I can take care of myself. I ain't a soft booby. You take care of the house. That's your job."

Thus, Meta believed something had died within her; certain of the elements of her being had expired, after the first few years. She believed she had crushed down her great love for love; believed she had forgotten it, put it back of her, stilled its outcry. When a peeping voice called, resolutely she beat it down.

And thus, for twenty-one years, seven months and thirteen days she lived in Hell.

IN A hard, tight way they were prosperous. David's job as foreman of the construction gang gave somewhat above their living, (the expenses always sternly dictated by the husband) and they managed to buy a cottage. On each Sunday they went to church, and David dropped a dime on the collection plate. Seven times in the years they had gone to a show.

On each workday morning, at six-thirty o'clock, David lifted from his seat at the table, wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, slammed the back door and went to his work. On each workday night he returned at six o'clock, silently drew cold water from the tap in the kitchen, doused his face and hands in the blue-enamel basin, flirted the blue-edged towel over his head and ate his supper.

After that, feet propped on a chair, he read the paper, tight-eyed, tight lipped—the same tight eyes and lips he used with his foreign workmen. Sometimes, dropping the paper, he spoke four or five curt words. Usually he didn't! When Meta, in the early days of her married life, attempted to prolong the conversation, he lifted to his feet and went to bed. Later in the years he told her gruffly, "Shut up, I'm tired."

Came the morning of the twenty-first year, seventh month and fourteenth day, which was in David's fifty-fourth year. He tossed back the covers of their bed, yawned, stretched, rubbed his eyes with his knuckles, and sat up. On the other side of the bed Meta bent over her shoelaces. She felt his hands pulling at the covers.

"It's still dark," he complained. "It ain't daylight."

Meta straightened up, staring at him and from him to the new sunlight streaming in at the window. She said nothing; surprise, fear, was heavy upon her.

David rubbed his eyes, stretched the lids, pulling them out with his fingers. Lifting his legs over the side of the bed he staggered to his feet, tottered a step or two, with hands outstretched, pawing the walls, feeling his way. Meta hurried to him.

"What's—what's the matter?" she asked quickly. Her thin hands were trembling.

"Eh?" He was feeling along the walls. "I don't—I don't know." He peered vacantly above her, around her, but never directly at her. "Something's the—*I can't see!* I don't—Is it morning? Is it daylight?"

Meta led him to a chair. Hovering about him, his curt commands brought her to herself.

"Get my clothes," he commanded. "Help—help me into them."

So far as she could remember, this was the first time in years that he had asked her aid. It came strangely from him.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he worried, rubbing his eyes.

"Don't rub them," Meta advised. "That'll make them worse."

David grumbled. Carefully, filled with nervousness at the unusual in her assisting him, Meta aided him to dress. He didn't bark at her. He was curiously silent—pathetically silent.

"I'll go down and see a doctor," he mused as she led him into the kitchen. "Wind's been blowing cement in my eyes, last two-three days. And dust, more'n a week. Eyes been hurting me for months, with the wind and dirt and everything. Mebbe my stomach is out of fix."

Meta watched him curiously, tensely. He strove to be casual, matter-of-fact, but his hands wavered in their task of conveying the food to his lips.

"I'll go down and see a doctor," he said again as he fumblingly pushed back the chair, almost fell to the floor, recovered his balance and clung to the table edge. "I'll go down right away. Get my hat!"

But David didn't go to the doctor. He didn't go to anyone, outside the narrow yard. David was blind.

AT FIRST, after the physician had made three trips, examined closely and announced positively there was no hope, both David and Meta were stunned.

The house was paid for, true, and compensation insurance would be available. They'd live—frugally—but they'd live. The thing of it was that David could not —*would* not—realize he was stricken. He cursed, grumbled, damned the Creator and His universe, and promised largely what a man would do when he could again see.

Meta held herself aloof, at first. Timidly her fingers would wander toward his shoulder, at times when she read aloud to him. Then, without touching him, they would be withdrawn.

After weeks it was that David realized: realized and was afraid. He who was now in total darkness, and who had been unafraid during all the days of his life, before, took on a fear of the night. It was not the darkness of blindness that overcame him, but the clutching fingers of dusk—he could *feel* them!—the whispering, hoarse voices that came with nightfall. His nervousness would grow in the late hours of the afternoon, and after supper, when Meta read to him, David would ask that she sit close. By little and little, after weeks, his hand would stray to her chair, seeking the assurance of her nearness.

Meta expanded quickly under this new softness. A hint of the forgotten maternal crept into her manner and into her eyes as she aided him in dressing or undressing, as she combed his hair and washed his face and hands. The warmth of youth came to her—a warmth matured with years, true—when merely she sat and watched, unseen, and saw the

nervous fumbling of his fingers, the increasing droop that was coming to his hard jaws, and the little trick of lifting his head, sideways. Seeing with his ears, this was. Meta began to hear vague boomings of happiness. Songs at times leaped to her lips.

A small cat came to the house, lingered, grew into Meta's affections, was carefully hidden in the kitchen. By little and little, as her boldness increased, she would carry the cat into the living-room, letting it sleep in her lap as she read to David.

One day, humming at her work in the kitchen, she peeked in to David and saw him tapping out the time of her song with his fingers on the arm of the chair. A sudden catch came to her breath, . . . The song leaped forth, full-toned, vibrant. David tapped and nodded, tapped and nodded, tapped and nodded.

Yet, with the repression of more than twenty-one years to fight against, Meta held herself back. In more than nineteen years David had never kissed her, willingly; in all that time no term of endearment had passed his lips, graciously. So she fought the coming of new thoughts, new hopes. They were too wide and deep; too likely to be misunderstood . . . As she once had misunderstood things.

One night David awoke in a great terror, and was as a small boy, frightened, alone in a strange room. The fear of the dark, the night-dark, was heavy upon him. He could feel it, pulling at him, crushing him, threatening him. A terrific dream had shaken him, and he couldn't open his eyes against it. That was the Hell of it! Before, when dreams had come, he could open his eyes, look about the familiar room, and know it was merely a dream. Now, the film of terror continued.

Instantly Meta's arms were about him, the soothing mother-touch. Meta's head was close to his shoulder, she whispered. Her voice reassured him. Out of a sound sleep—and this is the marvel that the mother-germ in every woman makes possible—she had arisen, prepared, unshaken, calm, David relaxed.

"Something. . ." he muttered, almost whimpered. "Something. . ." Then, after a long silence: "Oh, God—*blind!*"

It was his first complaint in words. Before that he had always been the hard, truculent old man, blinded yet truculent. Now he was softening.

Meta's arms pressed him back to the pillow. Her fingers crept to his hair, smoothing, smoothing. David drew close as though for protection, and his heavy right arm lay across her body. His lips were against her thin hair. Once, in his sleep, he murmured, "I'm sorry, old woman." Softly. In the tones that another man would have used with, "My dearest."

Meta understood, fully understood. Her body thrilled to it.

"I know," she whispered. "I know. Go to sleep—go to sleep—go to sleep."

Crooning to him, holding him close, gently she rocked him in her arms, as one would rock a babe, until he slept.

BUT Meta didn't sleep that night, which was the awakening to her Heaven. Her hand kept up its soft stroking of his hair, her voice kept up its whispered crooning. Even long after he slept, hand and voice went on. She felt him relax, breathe deeply, yet still she rocked gently, whispering her lullaby. . . the one she had learned in years gone past, and had used such a little while.

"Dear God in Heaven!" she whispered, once. "After these years—all these years." And again took up her lullaby.

After hours she rose, went into the bathroom, turned on the electricity so that it lighted into her sleeping room, and stood again above David. It was years since she had seen him like this, calm in sleep. So quiet, so good. Dear David!

Fearing the beating of her heart would awaken him, she crept back to the bathroom door and watched from there. David tossed. His hand went out, seeking over the pillow. Instantly she was at his side, slipping into the bed.

"Where?" he muttered. "Where are—"

"Here. . . dear." Meta whispered. It was the first time in nearly twenty years, that "dear." Her thoughts often had held it, but her lips had never framed it.

"Here, my dear," she repeated, growing bolder.

David sighed. The lids slipped back over his blank eyes. He breathed evenly, content in her keeping, and his hard hand snuggled against her cheek.

IN THE weeks that followed Meta expanded like a flower that has been kept in a darkened cellar and is suddenly lifted to sunlight. Ten years dropped from her eyes, her breasts grew rounder, higher, her body straighter. She became alert.

Smiling through the hours of the day she hurried about her tasks—singing, laughing through the doorway to David, who sat in his chair and tapped out the time to her songs.

At night, his head pillowed on her shoulder, she would close her eyes tight, forcing herself to sleep that the day might come more quickly. She was as a new bride. Every hour held a hundred new wonders.

The little cat grew into a larger cat, and grew more largely into Meta's affections. David, at times, held the purring animal on his knees, stroked it, seemed content in the touch of companionship it brought to him.

Haltingly, David had come to say "My dear," and "sweetheart." When one of these had first dropped from his lips, Meta stopped in her work, tensed. Then she hurried to him, crept to him, almost on her knees. Great sobs shook her.

Six months wore on, after the coming of the blindness, and one day Mrs. Jobbins, who kept the drug store at the corner of the block, came hurrying into the yard of the Hansen place. Meta and David sat on the porch. Mrs. Jobbins motioned mysteriously to Meta, who went down to the gate to talk with the woman.

"There's a—Doctor Dulayne," Mrs. Jobbins began breathlessly. "He's a great specialist, eye specialist. He's here, in town—a friend of our family, used to visit us when he was a little feller," (she had recovered her breath and was running on at her usual speed), "and I told him about your man, and he thinks he may do something for him. Thinks mebbe he can op'rate."

Importantly and smilingly, after the whispers, Mrs. Jobbins waited. She was an eager fat woman who garbed with importance each action and movement, exactly as she importantly weighed out the poisons and medicines in her shop. This was the highest moment in her life, she felt, this carrying of the great news to Meta.

"Let's tell David." Meta said at last, turning back to the porch.

David heard, without speaking, but the tightening of his body was perceptible. At the end he nodded.

"We'll have him up tomorrow," Meta suggested. David was deep in thought. Mrs. Jobbins was hurrying back to her neglected shop. "We'll go to see—"

"Tell him to come up right away," David cut in. "Today. Right away!"

"But, dear," Meta objected, "perhaps he—"

"At once! Tell him to hurry." Finality was in his command.

Dr. Dulayne came on the third day, and during the hours intervening between Mrs. Jobbins' breathless announcement and the specialist's visit, Meta lived with shrieking nerves, hers and David's. Nothing that she attempted pleased the man. Her fingers on his

head, in the soothing gesture he had asked in those past weeks, were flung off. His old arrogance grew into him again.

"Yes," the specialist announced, after the long examination, "success is certain. It will be a tedious operation, but it will come out fine."

He made an engagement for the following Saturday, four days off.

"There's nothing we can do until then," he continued. "I will be busy until Saturday. Two or three old friends I must look up. Bring him to the hospital, then. No, there's no occasion for that expense. We'll look after it right here. I'll find a nurse."

Rubbing his hands together, he smiled broadly, delightedly.

"It will be a splendid operation—great! You will be very happy."

Meta wondered, steadily and increasingly wondered about this, after the doctor left. Would she be happy? Could anything, any set of circumstances in the world bring so great happiness as the past months in which she had mothered a man? What would be the way of her life, after David saw? . . . Steadily and increasingly, as the four days wore on, she gave herself to the solution of this question.

Already David was changing, the dictatorial manner falling upon him again. His voice was hardening, his jaw stiffening, his shoulders lifting aggressively. Already he had begun to tell her of the things a man would do for himself, after the coming of Saturday. In all its hideous repulsion, Meta felt again the coming of her Hell.

On Thursday, working, she had begun to sing. David called out angrily:

"Cut out that yowling! I want to think. Let me think. I haven't had a minute to myself for nearly a year."

Later in the afternoon, after reading a newspaper, she obtained David's permission and went to Mrs. Jobbins' store, sitting in the space back of the partition with the proprietress. Meta's eyes wandered searchingly over the shelves, laden with their bottles. Before her she saw strange names of drugs. Flitting back and forth across the rows of bottles, her body gave a little start as she recognized a name. Furtively she glanced at the folded paper, which she had brought with her.

"It tells here," she said, "about two people that took something and never waked up."

Mrs. Jobbins wiped her glasses on the hem of her apron, and read the tale in the newspaper.

"A hypnotic," she said importantly, when she had finished, and went into description of hypnotics. Thus Meta learned there were poisons that did not twist as they killed.

A girl came in to buy a chocolate soda, and Meta was left alone in the space back of the prescription case, the space with its shelves filled with bottles that bore strange-sounding names. Fingering over this stock, after she had arisen hurriedly and looked stealthily toward the front, she found the bottle with the familiar name, the name that was set forth in the newspaper.

When Meta left the back room, half hour later, one hand in her apron pocket tightly was clasping a hurriedly-wrapped small package.

FRIDAY was torture-day. David gave Meta no moment to herself, but continually called to her, demanding some attention, then bemoaning the blindness that made the attention necessary.

"But, dear," Meta said once, "I am so glad—"

"Don't 'dear' me!" he barked. "I'm not a baby. In a week I'll be different. I won't be setting here while you're babying me. Don't baby me! Don't 'dear' me!"

Thus she found she must drop the new tender word from her thoughts. She must harden herself again. She must—

Out in the kitchen, later, she fought the thing out. Could she forget? Could she go back to the terror? After these weeks? These white, golden glad weeks?

From the time of the doctor's first visit, David lost his fear of the night-dark. He turned his back to Meta, on each of the three nights, and snored immediately. On Friday night, Meta did not sleep and David did not know it. She did not sleep because she had been to see the great specialist, her visit unknown to David, and had questioned him.

"David—my man," she asked, "will come out all right?"

Dr. Dulayne had patted her shoulder.

"As surely as the sun rises—as the day comes, he will see again," he smiled.

"There is no—no mistake?" she insisted.

"None."

So, thinking over this statement, weighing the possibility, striving to arrange in her mind the various perplexities, that night she lay awake. In the small hours of the morning she rose, went into the living-room, carefully lighted the fire, fearful of a noise that would awaken David, and sat long before the little stove, gazing into it. At times she walked to the window, watching the coming of the dawn, seeing the stretching forth of the golden-pink fingers of the east. She marveled at the beauty of the coming of day. She had not noticed it before, for years and years. She had been too tired, too taken up with other things. Now she was keyed up.

Aiding David to dress, after breakfast, on that last morning, she fell under the continual pricks of his tight temper. He fumed when she momentarily left the room.

"Don't you know I've got to hurry!" he called. "I have to be ready by eleven o'clock. What are you doing? Step around, there!"

"Yes. I'm just getting things ready. Myself and some things for you."

"For me? I don't have to get anything ready!"

"Yes," she answered quietly. "You must be dressed. You would not look like a bum—a hobo. You must dress."

She brought his black suit, and stood quietly at his side.

"I'm ready to dress you, now."

His fingers skipped over the cloth.

"Get my grey suit," he ordered. "I don't want that black thing. I'm not going to a funeral."

"This is your grey suit," Meta lied. "You—you have just not yet learned to feel—"

"That's right!" he stormed. "Twit me about my blindness!"

"Dear!" she cried. "Dear!"

"Do what you've got to do and don't pester me with talk!" he raged. "Get away! I can do this."

His arms becoming twisted in the vest, Meta quietly assisted him. He stormed and called her "clumsy."

"In about a week—a week," he whimpered, "I'll be out of this: I'll be my own man again. . . . But this feels like my black suit."

"It's your grey one," Meta said again.

Pattering about the kitchen in her slippered feet, an apron over her best grey silk dress, Meta put the kettle on the stove, and squeezed two lemons into two cups. The querulous tones of David grated into her. The sunlight had left her days, the voices of the birds were stilled, the colors had bleached from the flowers.

The faces of her two children came into things, seemed to be ringed in the bottoms of the cups; and she saw again the piteous fright of the two white rats. The crunching of the bones in the jaws of the old cat, her neighbor's cat, was in her ears. The little new cat, the one that had come to her, brushed against her skirt, and she lifted it in her arms, cradling it close, feeling her body respond to the rumbling of its purr. Walking to the window, she looked out into the golden world.

She had glimpsed Paradise. During a few short weeks of the long, long years, unutterable joy had flashed before her. She had drunk deep of the wine of living. Now, the dregs again.

"Ah, God!" she whispered. "No." And, again, fiercely, "No!"

The room swam. She felt herself falling. The cat leaped from her arms, and stood in a corner, watching her. Catching at the table, she steadied herself until she was calmed, quieted.

She moved to the stove, lifted the kettle, divided the water into two cups and carried them into the living-room. David kept up his railing, fretting, asking about the time, about the weather, about the possibility of the doctor forgetting the engagement, about her fumbling, clumsy, trembling fingers. She had never known him so voluble, so vitriolic.

"Here," she said gently, holding the steaming cup beneath his nose. "Drink this. It'll strengthen you. . . . You'll need strength, you know."

He pushed it away.

"Don't baby me! Don't pester around me. I'm strong enough."

"But drink it," she insisted. "It will warm you up."

Still grumbling, he obeyed, then resumed his raging.

"Blast a pestering woman," he grated. "We ain't got no time to fool around. Look out the door, there, and see if you can see him. Hurry!"

Drained cup in her hand, Meta waited, quietly waited. David started from his chair, fumbled to his feet, took a staggering step or two, feeling his way about the room.

"Where. . . ?" he asked. His lips curiously were thickened. He staggered against the door frame, and would have fallen except for Meta's quick arms.

"I'm—I'm—," he muttered. "I'm—"

"I know," she whispered. "Just lie down a little. Just rest a minute."

With his body leaning heavily against her, she guided his feet to the bed and stretched him upon it. Breathing deeply, he sighed, struggled upward and would have risen, except for Meta's pressing hands. During ticking minutes she stood there, watching. . . . watching. David groaned, whimpered. His body stiffened.

One could see it stiffening.

Meta went into the living-room, lifted the second cup from the table and carried it back to the sleeping room. In the careful moment, out of her habit of a lifetime, she crossed David's arms over his body, straightened his legs, smoothed his thin hair. Two specks of lint she found on the coat of the black suit, and with wetted finger she brushed them away. David looked nice, she thought as she stood looking down upon him. The new cat had followed her into the room, and was now at her feet, rubbing its arched back against the edge of her skirt.

Stretching herself beside David, Meta smoothed all wrinkles out of the grey silk dress. She hoped it wouldn't be mussed.

Then, having prepared her house, she lifted on one elbow, raised the second cup to her lips, and drained it. It had a sweetish taste, she decided.

In a little while, a grey haze began to steal over her, a soft grey haze. She was rising, floating, wavering in long loops and dashes. It was delicious; peacefully and quietly delicious. Grey clouds enveloped her, softening her journey; she knew David was beside her, could feel his body rising and lifting with hers, going with her on the journey through the grey clouds.

Once, for a moment—or was it an age?—she was fearful that David would fall from the great height to which they were ascending. David was blind. She must guard against his falling. Her arms wavered out, under David's neck, cradling his head in the crook of her shoulder, drawing him closer to her as the grey sleep came.

The new cat leaped lightly to the bed, stood for a moment, tail switching, watching Meta's features. Her free hand was stretched at her side, close to the feet of the cat. Her fingers began to close, thumb folding inward, under the fingers, close against the hardened palm.

The new cat watched, tail switching. Cautiously the animal extended a front paw, delicately touching the closing fingers. Dropping to its belly, it gently touched the fingers, as they gripped the thumb, touched them again and again.

The Final Installment of

The People of the Comet*

By AUSTIN HALL

CHAPTER SEVEN

"'I DREW up in front of the dwelling, and as I came to a stop the maiden, without a bit of hesitation, ran out to meet me, running alongside the ether ship until she came to the porthole where she could look in at me.

"'Never had I seen any one so beautiful.

"'She had a lack of fear that came from innocence. She was as golden haired as a fairy, and of a grace that far outdid that of any maiden I had ever known upon the Earth. Her features were perfect; her lips red as the juice of berries; and her form sylphlike. Her dress was even stranger than her beauty—a tunic of feathers thrown over her right shoulder, leaving her left breast bare, but covering her waist, and reaching down to her knees. Her feet were sandaled.

"'It was a strange moment for the both of us.

"'Here was I, an adventurer from the planet Earth, on a visit to a comet; What a maiden was this! She was the most beautiful I had ever looked at; her eyes blue, large, innocent, and full of eagerness. Her whole expression was that of hope, wonder, impatience. She held one hand above the port-hole and peered within, and when she saw me she began beckoning. There was a strange look in her eyes that I could not fathom.

"'For a minute I remained in my seat, admiring her beauty. I could not hear her, of course; but I could watch her impatience. She was as natural as a child and as splendid as a goddess. When I did not move she clenched her tiny fist and pounded on the port-hole.

"'She pointed toward the dwelling. Her eyes were wide, pleading. When I did not answer she broke into a little spasm of anger and beat her fist against the side as if she would break her way through the ether ship.

"'What could be the meaning of such a reception as this? Who could she be?

"'I had to be careful. Even if there were an atmosphere upon the nucleus I had no proof that I could live in it. I could see all kinds of organic life, to be sure, but it was not such as I had known upon the Earth. I would first make a test of the cometary atmosphere; so I pressed a lever and ran a glass container out through one of the small doors.

"'The girl seemed to understand. When she saw what I had done she reached down and picked up a kitten-like creature that was running about her feet, and placed it in the container. Then she gave a sign.

"'Thus I tested the atmosphere of the comet. I drew in the glass and examined the kitten, or what I call such, for it had really the legs of a rabbit. If the creature should suffer at all in the ether car—that is, in my own atmosphere—I would know that I could not venture outside.

"'The girl watched through the port-hole.

"'I placed the little creature upon the floor. At first it was timid. But after a bit it began scampering about in perfect comfort. If the kitten could live in my own air there was no reason why I could not venture outside. The girl seemed to anticipate my intention. She ran to the door.

"'When I stepped out of the ether car I was a bit unsteady. I had been many hours without sleep; and I had been forced, throughout the whole journey, to maintain myself in a more or less cramped position. The air outside was fresh and balmy, sweet like the morning. There was no sky such as we know upon the Earth, and no sunlight. The air was full of a red glow that came from the coma above us. The gravitation was vertical as it is upon the Earth; and I did not notice that I felt a bit stronger or lighter than I had felt in Sansar. This, I learned, afterward, was because of the extreme magnetic pitch of the nucleus. The horizon, where the whirling rim shot up its wreaths, was the blaze of glorious crimson. The grass under my feet was soft, like clover. The air was good to breathe.

"'The girl ran up to me. In the clear view of the open light she was even more beautiful. Her arms were bare, finely moulded. She was devoid of all fear, or immodesty; her eyes were like a child's. Like a child she seized me by the arm and began speaking.

"'I marvelled at her voice, at its softness, and at its wistfulness; but I could not understand. The words she spoke had no meaning to me. I could only read her gestures, and look into her wonderful eyes. Clearly something was wrong. She clung to my arm, and by impassioned pantomime let me know that it was in the dwelling. Her interest was not in the ether ship; nor in its contents.

"'I could not but follow. The door yard was carpeted with verdure, and spangled with flowers; trees surrounded the stone dwelling on three sides. To the left ran the little river.

"'She took my hand in hers and led me up the path. Her palm was soft and magnetic; I could sense her thrill of hope, eagerness and triumph. Twice she looked up at me and smiled—a look of childish possession and pride, as if I had come just in time to fulfill a long lost hope. At the door she stopped. She held her finger to her lips, and entered—alone.

"'In a minute she returned. She took my hand again, and led me across the threshold, through an ante-room, and then through another door. Then she stopped. She pointed to a figure reclining upon a couch on the opposite side of the room.

"'It was the form of a man, one of the most remarkable men I had ever seen, a man very aged, and venerable, a giant of a man. He was asleep, or (the thought startled) perhaps dying! He was propped up in pillows; his arms were crossed on the coverlet before him. His beard and hair were of snowy whiteness; and his face, even with the eyes closed, was the noblest that I had ever seen. His forehead was immense. I sensed at once that here was virtue, pride, wisdom, nobility. Who was this strange man, and who was the maiden? What had brought them here!

"'The girl left my side. She ran to the bed and knelt down. First she picked up one of the worn hands and kissed it; then she raised up and pressed her lips to those of the sleeper. She spoke a few words.

**The first half of this story was published in the September issue of WEIRD TALES. A copy will be mailed by the publishers for 25 cents.*

" 'The eyes opened. A murmur, and the aged man's hand sought the golden hair that stooped over his breast. In the depths of those eyes was a tenderness past all understanding—and sadness.

" 'The girl took the caress; she held up her face; she spoke; and I could hear the ripple of her voice. Then she pointed at me.

" 'The man looked up.

" 'I can see him yet, his eyes gray, great, kindly; full of wonder, and calmness. I could see that he was dying; and that his end was cosmic. He was not of the ordinary lot of men; but of something greater—a monarch. A grateful light came into his eyes.

" 'He looked down at the maiden. He spoke slowly, questioning. Once he glanced at me.

" 'Then the girl answered. She spoke in the same musical voice, punctuated with gestures. Undoubtedly she was describing the ether ship and the manner of my arrival. The old man's face softened as the girl went on. Twice he smiled and patted her hair. When she had finished he pointed to an elliptical clock work upon the side-wall.

" 'I had not noticed it before. Upon the wall was an oblong track constructed of black metal, covered with white markings, a graduated scale of some sort; and along the bottom of the track an arrow.

" 'The girl stepped up to the wall, and dipped a brush into a black fluid. Just above the arrowhead she dabbed a mark. Then she began writing a list of notations and calculations that the old man called off. When he had finished the old man looked at me. He beckoned.

" 'I approached the bed side. For a minute I stood still, gazing down into his wonderful face. What a man was this, and what had brought him here?

" 'The maiden came to my side: she took my arm. The man by a supreme effort straightened among the pillows. He was old, very old. He made an indication. The girl stooped down; and, following her example, I knelt by her side.

" 'Then there were words between the man and the maiden, words that I could not understand. Then silence—after which he reached out and touched my head. I looked up; and I read his story.

" 'The man was dying. He was alone; the maiden was his child. I had come in time to be her protector. By his lips I knew that he was praying—that he was thanking One for the miracle that had brought me to the comet. I wondered whether I would be worthy of the daughter of such a patriarch.

" 'Then I felt ashamed. Why had I jumped to such a thought? He was asking that I be her protector. She was too much of a child, too beautiful, too tender, for a man like myself. I would live for her, protect her, and, if possible, win her love. I was startled at the thought.

" 'He took her hand and placed it in mine. Then he held his outspread hands above our heads, and spoke in benediction. When he was through he looked into my eyes. It was a supreme moment; and I understood. Henceforth I was not to be king of the Sansars, but the guardian of this girl.

" 'When we stood up again the girl looked into my face; she held both hands upon my shoulders; her eyes were full of tears, tears of gratitude, hope, sorrow, happiness. In their depths I could read the story of loneliness, hope and maidenhood; I had come through miracle; but even so, I had been expected. Henceforth I must live for the dreams of this child. What a queen she would be!

" 'I glanced about the room and at its furnishings. There was a strange array of instruments, pieces of machinery, pamphlets, what not. Upon one wall was a mass of diagrams, astronomical figures, and calculations. The old man pointed out a map and a roll of parchment. The girl brought it to him. When she had spread it, he called me to the bed side.

" 'It was a star map such as I had never seen, through which the head of an ellipse was drawn through a group of nine dots. The old man placed his finger upon the third dot from the center. Then he looked up. He pointed to the clock. It was a minute before I could comprehend. When I did I was astounded.

" 'He was pointing out the Earth! The track upon the wall was but a clockwork that followed the course of the comet! This marvelous man had ridden the comet on its journey through infinity!

" 'I nodded. Then I pointed to myself, and made a motion of soaring through the air. The girl spoke and he seemed to understand. He said something and made a sweep with his hand. The girl nodded.

" 'The girl led me from the room; at the threshold she stopped and looked up at my face, her eyes full of wonder, trust, happiness. She took my hand and spoke words that seemed to bear the meaning:

" " "Come. And I shall show you."

" 'She led me across the door yard, through the fernlike trees to a field by the edge of the little river. It was a meadow of perhaps a dozen acres, in which a number of purple birds, very much like ostriches were feeding. They were grouped about a vegetation in the center of the enclosure.

" 'We tramped through the cloverlike grass. The air was balmy; the sky overhead crimson and wonderful past all beholding; the breath of myriad flowers filled the air. It was like a day in spring. She conducted me straight to the object in the center of the field. When we had reached it she began tearing away the creepers that covered the sides. She stood up and pointed at what lay underneath, as if to say:

" " "Behold. Here is our story."

" 'With a cry, I sprang forward. For it was an ether ship very much like my own; it had been wrecked, distorted, burnt; but still it was an ether ship. One side had been scorched by a terrible flame; the agacite walls lay bare, twisted, torn. Here was the story; the story of a great adventure come to an end that might have been my own.

" 'What a force was this that had crumbled the agacite that I had supposed impervious to temperature and current!

" 'The girl seemed to read my thoughts; she touched my arm and pointed to the blinding wreaths that were flashing from the revolving nucleus. Then I understood. The man and the maiden had come even as I had come; and they had been caught in the terrible current. Perhaps, at the time, the opening through the rim had not been as large as it was when I had entered. Their ship had been disabled and they had been forced to remain upon this little cometary world where I had found them.

" 'At any rate, it accounted for the girl's lack of fear, when I had sailed into the nucleus. How long had they been upon the comet? Where had they come from?

" 'The girl seemed to divine the first question. She touched herself upon the breast and held one hand close to the ground.

" 'A baby! She had been here all her life. I computed the comet's speed, and performed a rapid calculation. It brought me far beyond Neptune, the most distant of our planets. The girl had come from a star!

" 'We were standing at the foot of the mountain close by the source of the bubbling river. The fernlike trees ascended the slope for some distance above us; the mountain was a lone one, round like a small volcano. I remembered the pink sheet of water that I had seen upon the summit. I pointed toward the height. I could see a trail winding up among the crags and bowlders. The mountain was natural enough; but I could conceive of no sheet of water that had a natural

tint of pink. Perhaps it had some relation to the revolving rim of the nucleus.

"'It was the first time that she showed fear. When I pointed, she reached up and clutched my hand; she drew it down and interposed her pretty body as if to shield me from even the thought of an ascent; her eyes went wide, startled, and there was a fear in them that I could not understand.

"'It was useless to try to get at an explanation, so I caught hold of the creepers and drew myself to the top of the wrecked ether ship. Then I caught hold of the girl's hands and drew her up beside me. The touch of her flesh sent a thrill through my body; she was wonderful; beautiful; her bare arms and wild barbaric dress gave her a touch that I had never seen in a maiden. She landed on the top like a fairy, her eyes shining and her whole form vibrant. Skipping past my side, she parted the creepers that blocked the way to the door of the ether ship.

"'Inside I found just about what I expected—atomic engines wrecked and demolished, and the machinery torn away. What there was left gave evidence of a civilization about on a par with my own. In the dismantled interior I read a tragic story, a tragedy that had its beginning here and its end in the house up under the fern trees. What must have been their life upon the comet! It had been without hope until my coming. What must have been the thoughts of the father as he saw his end approaching — his daughter alone and unprotected?

"'She had known no world but this. She was like a fairy—a child of the heaven—the daughter of the stars!

"'What a story they had to tell! They had undoubtedly come from a planet far beyond the ken of our telescopes—from the vicinity of some star that we could study only through the spectrum!

"'I recalled the clock upon the wall of the old man's chamber, the astronomical designs and calculations. He was a man of untold wisdom; he had charted the stars, not from a distance, but through actual travel. Would I get his story? Would I ever be able to exchange thoughts with this remarkable man? One thing—I must learn their language.

"'We returned to the dwelling. On the way I began my lesson, picking up familiar objects, asking their name and giving their Sansar equivalent. The girl was delighted. The lesson was entered into with zeal on both sides. In a few moments I had words enough buzzing in my head to befog a linguist.

"'When we reached the house I went down to my own ether ship and returned with such articles as I thought would add to our comfort. After that I paid a visit to the father, whom I found asleep. And then I sat down to a repast spread for me by the daughter of the stars!

"'The lesson went on. One by one, I picked up the names of familiar objects, taking care to give their equivalent in Sanscrit. Suddenly I thought of the most interesting name of all. I pointed at my companion.

"'She did not understand; so. I turned my finger upon myself.

"'"Alvas," I said.

"'She smiled and repeated the word after me, only when she spoke it the word had a musical ring. She lingered over the name and repeated it over and over. Then I pointed at her again. She laughed this time and tapped her breast.

"'"Sora," she said.

I pointed at the room where the father lay sleeping.

"'"Zin," spoke the maiden.

"'Thus it was that I became acquainted with the star rovers, father and daughter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"'TIME had passed. Under the spell of Sora's eyes I had lingered upon the wonderful nucleus, learning the language of Zar, and teaching the maiden the tongue of my own Sansar. I forgot all else but the light of her eyes and the witchery of her laughter; and a story that they had to tell—a story greater than even the universe itself.

"'I could not return to the Earth with both the sick father and the daughter, because of the limited capacity of the ether ship, therefore I had chosen to remain.

"'I knew now, by the light of the coma, that we had circled the sun and were on our way into the depths of Space. From the girl I learned that the nucleus was a cosmic mechanism, as automatic as a time clock and that it registered its approach to a star or sun by the wreaths of the revolving rim, which grew and dazzled as the comet approached the luminary and diminished upon its retrogression.

"'We had often noticed this from the Earth. We had noted that the brilliancy of the nucleus increases as it approaches the sun, but that it disappears as the comet retreats into the starry distance.

"'My interest as an astronomer overcame my inclination as a King of Sansar. I was bound up in the mystery of the comet, and in the man and the maiden.

"'From the girl I had been unable to learn anything definite concerning the planet Zar and the train of circumstance that had brought her father with a mere babe to the nucleus of the comet. I could only gather that he was an astronomer, even as myself. Our adventures, up to the discovery of the nucleus must have been very near parallel. Of the planet Zar I could learn very little that was definite, other than the fact that it was a member of a solar system different from our own.

"'That, of course, was a great deal. It proved that the comet was an interstellar body—and if I could gather more data I might establish my theory that it was merely an ion.

"'The old man lingered. He had not spoken since the moment of my arrival. I had hopes that I could master the language in time to learn his story.

"'What did he know? And what were his theories? As an astronomer I was just as eager as I was as a lover. For by this time there was no doubt of my love for Sora.

"'We spent much time at our lessons. Between times we made short trips about the nucleus. It was a wonderful little world, full of flowers, fern trees, myriad-colored birds, and queer harmless animals. The weather was always balmy. I discovered that the temperature of the comet was in no way dependent upon the sun, that the comet furnished its own heat as well as light. There was no night. And as the coma shone always, and as the tail of the comet was ever about us, there were no stars. We were imprisoned in the comet's glory.

"'But there were two things that the maiden would not let me visit—one was the summit of the lone mountain where I had seen the lake, the other was the rim of the nucleus.

"'She gave me to understand, first, by signs, and afterward by words, that it was certain death to venture too close. I had seen enough of the rim upon my arrival to know that it was a terrible thing; but I was not so certain concerning the pink lake that I had seen upon the mountain. When I asked questions she grew white and pointed to the wrecked ether ship. She insisted that I stay away; and when she spoke in that manner and stamped her little foot it was law unto Alvas the Sansar. Though I was a king no longer, she was a queen.

"'The day came when the father awoke and called me to his bedside. Since my arrival he had lain in a sort of stupor. The girl told me that such had been his condition for a long time previous to my coming. She had grown accustomed to it.

"'I had known from the first that the man was dying. He was very old—

so old that I doubted whether he was her father; there was something great about him, a giant both in intellect and stature, a man who could only die by inches. I had often stolen into the room to watch him. He was like a god, splendid and supreme even in his weakness.

" 'At his request Sora withdrew from the room. I helped him among his pillows and straightened them out. I sat beside him. He reached over and touched me with his hand. He spoke in the language of Zar:

" " "My daughter has taught you the speech of Zar?"

" " "She has."

" " "Who are you?"

" " "I am Alvas the Sansar."

" " "What is Sansar?"

" " "It is the name of a country—a kingdom."

" " "And you are one of its people?"

" " "I am its king."

" 'He nodded.

" " "I see. You have a civilization, perhaps equal to that of Zar. We had kings. But our men were equal. Our great men were great by their merits. We had our Wise Men."

" " "We in Sansar also have our Wise Men. The king is supposed to be the wisest of them all. He could not be a king, else."

" " "That is good," he spoke. "I like that kind of a king. You look worthy. You are a man, clean, strong, noble. I have prayed to the One above us, to the One who rules us all, and asked for your coming. I asked it for Sora, the little one—I could not leave her alone."

" 'When he spoke of the maiden his voice went tender, and seemed to be strung to fine music. Before, it had been that of a patriarch, or rather, that of a stricken Zeus. He was a wonderful figure, his beard and hair snow white, his forehead massive, his eyes steel cold, and his mouth the firmest I had ever seen. Both in torso and in spirit, he would have ranked as a giant among my kind of men. He was sublime even in his helplessness.

" " "Sora," he went on. "You know her name. Did she tell you the meaning of Sora?"

" " "No. It is a name. To me it is a beautiful one."

" 'He gave me a quick look, as if he understood what was behind my words; it seemed to please him.

" " "It means sunlight," he answered. "And sunlight is a thing she has never seen—except as a baby. But she is sunlight to me and to the little world she lives in. Even the birds love her. She is love itself."

" " "I know that," I answered.

" " "He reached out and placed his hand upon my head.

" " "My son," he asked. "Tell me. Do you love her?"

" " "I am sure of it."

" " "That is well," he answered. "And you are worthy. You will protect her and care for her. You are chosen by One higher than myself. Tell me now, how you came here."

" " "I am an astronomer," I answered. "I am an astronomer who lived upon the Earth, a scientific king of the Sansars. I was interested in comets. Upon the Earth we know practically nothing about comets, we know nothing about their laws, nor of their relation to Infinity. We only know that they are not planetary, and that they are seemingly inter-stellar. We know nothing of the why of a comet."

" " "Have you no theory?"

" " "Yes. I have a theory. A strange one. One that I would prove."

" " "I see. Go on. What is your theory?"

" " "I have contended that our planet Earth with its central sun—or I should say, the sun and all its planets—is but an atom. I would take the atomic theory and apply it to the stars."

" 'His eyes brightened: he straightened perceptibly; and he looked at me in a sort of pride.

" " "Yes," he said. "Go on."

" " "That was and is my contention. Our solar system is nothing but an atom. I am an astronomer. On the Earth, I held that we would never solve Infinity through our telescopes. Better, I said, that we study our own atom. Afterward, we might be able to find our way out. I held that a comet is but an ion of cohesion or adhesion, as the case may be, with a function exactly analogous to the ions that hold together the atoms of this pencil. I would solve the comet and get at its secret. I came in an ether ship. When I reached the nucleus I found the gap in the rim. I sailed through and discovered this marvelous cometary world. I found Sora and yourself; and I determined to stay."

" 'He thought a moment.

" " "Then you contend that the visible Universe is, after all, nothing but matter—substance?"

" " "Yes."

" 'He shut his eyes and lay back for a minute—thinking. Suddenly he opened them.

" " "What is this substance?"

" " "I do not know."

" " "Yet you say that the comet is an ion?"

" " "Yes."

" " "And you cannot see your way out?"

" " "I am afraid that I do not understand."

" 'He held out his hand.

" " "Here," he said, "feel my hand. What is the matter with it?"

" 'I took it in my own. I did not understand. His hand was cold, ice cold. I looked up in question.

" " "What is the matter with my hand?" He repeated.

" " "I do not know." I answered. "Your hand is cold. I do not understand."

" " "Yet you would solve the Universe," he answered. "You would go into Infinity before you have solved yourself. You have placed your finger on the secret of all matter, and you have not guessed it. You say that my hand is cold. Do you know the reason? You can see that I am old, dying. Why?"

" 'I did not answer.

" " "Simply," he went on, "because of this—the ions are going, passing out. I am old, worn; the cohesive forces of my body are slipping away; and as they pass away the atoms fall apart, one by one. I have been a strong man. Now I am an old one. I am old because the ions that hold the atoms have been expelled in the struggle of life. When the ions go the atoms have nothing to hold them together: they pass out to form new combinations—perhaps new life. Next to the atoms the molecules break down, the flesh cells shrivel and we lose strength—hence, old age—weakness—death. We die by ions. When the spirit goes, all goes; the center fountain of the ion has dried up. We call that Death. The Spirit goes on."

" " "But matter is indestructible."

" " "To be sure it is. But not identity. Matter may pass back into the ether and still be matter. It can hold its identity only through its cohesion. The ions of cohesion and adhesion are the forces that control: they are at the bottom of all life and substance, of all that man calls matter. Be it iron or flesh, matter can hold its identity only through its cohesion; and there is nothing so small or so great but what has its identity. The Universe has it. Infinity itself must have identity, at least intrinsically. Everything must have its ions. You have guessed right. A comet is an ion."

" " "All this sounds good," I answered. "It is my theory. Every man likes to have his own theory justified. But for all that, unless we can prove it, our argument remains, after all, nothing but subtle sophistry. Talk is talk, no matter how lofty. Is there any way of proving

that a comet is an ion? Take, for instance, this comet."

"'"There is."

"'He straightened up, and his eyes seemed to glow with sudden fire.

"'"It can be proved," he spoke. "Not only can it be proved, but you may, if you wish, see the other side of the Universe!"

"'I started.

"'"This is the first time," he went on, "that an ion has been held by a conscious controlling intelligence. The comet is an ion; your solar system is an atom; the stars are all atoms, all moving according to atomic laws, vibrating, revolving, crossing, holding together, each in its place, apparently unending."

"'"How would I see the other side of the Universe?"

"'He thought a moment; then he spoke:

"'"Perhaps I ought not to tell you. You are the protector of Sora. And that must be the first duty of your life. It was mine. But, for all that, you have a right to my secret. As a young man I set out to solve the riddle of the stars. I have not done it. But God has sent you to take up and follow my work. I prayed for it. Perhaps he will grant you what he has denied to me.

"'"Had it not been for Sora I would have driven the comet through the Universe long ago. But my child came first. Love is greater than all. I have the love of a father. Had I been alone I would have gone to the other side—perhaps perished. But at least, I would have seen."

"'"How is it possible," I asked, "to drive this comet out of the Universe?"

"'"It is easily possible. Have you seen the rim of the nucleus?"

"'"Only as I came through. Sora has kept me away from it, since. She swears it is death."

"'"It is. Do not approach it; its force is inconceivably greater than anything you have upon your Earth. Have you seen the lake?"

"'"From the ether ship, only."

"'"The lake feeds the rim automatically," he answered, "and in a manner prescribed by natural law. It feeds it just so fast or just so slowly. It regulates the speed of the comet. When it approaches a solar system, or atom, it feeds faster, answering the natural law, and imparts its peculiar quality of cohesion. The faster it feeds, the greater the speed of the comet.

"'"I would let the whole lake into the rim of the nucleus at one time. The comet would still be an ion, but it would be an ion gone wild, what you call energy—heat. It would pass through the substance to the surface and into the super ether.

"'"This is exactly what is taking place at all times in matter. For instance: if I take this stick and place it in a fire, the cohesion immediately comes to the surface, the atoms fall apart and become whirring forces; afterwards, the ions settle, and the atoms rearrange to form new matter. This is what we call heat, energy, and is the source of all mechanics, and all force. But it is nothing, after all, but the release of uncounted myriads of ions."

"'I was thinking of my own Earth. So I asked:

"'"If this were done with this one particular ion, would it hurt my own solar atom?"

"'"Not at all. Or at least, only infinitesimally. There are myriads of ions for each atom. Perhaps the ion would return. But it would surely pass to the surface."

"'I thought for a moment. All my life I had been dreaming of a way to get through the stars. What lay beyond them? What were they for? But I had never dreamed of such a moment as this: I could only ask:

"'"How would I turn the lake into the rim?"

"'"I have arranged for that," he answered. "You have seen the path winding up the side of the mountain. It leads toward the outlet, where the liquid force flows into the rim. Do not go too close. You will find a switch where the path stops. By simply pressing a lever you will loosen an atomic current that will blow out the channel. The lake will drop down and rush into the rim. That will be all. The comet will no longer be cohesive. It will be a mad ion, a bit of heat, energy. It will pass to the surface of the substance, to the outside of the Universe.

"'"But the heat?" I asked, "such a speed is unknown. The nucleus would burn."

"'"Not at all. You cannot destroy an ion. You merely loosen it. The nucleus will be protected by its own coma. You will not notice its speed."

"'"But," I interposed, "nothing can travel so swiftly, not even electricity."

"'"The force of the ion is swift. It is as swift as thought. It is not the first time that an ion has been thrown out. It will only be obeying a natural law. It must pass out until it can recover its balance: perhaps it will return."

"'"One more question. Granting that we go out, how would we be conscious in such an immensity?"

"'"That is a fair question. And I have thought it out. To do that I have had to get at the center force of the ion, the spirit, life, or what you will. You understand the ovum, the first form of life—the germ in the egg sac?"

"'"Yes, to a certain point; it is the beginning of all life, the nucleus that splits and becomes two, four, eight, protoplasmic cells, called blastomeres, and each one containing a nucleus like the original. They multiply by division; they are the secret of all life—and the mystery."

"'"Not at all. The whole process is simple, once you understand it. You are puzzled only so long as you regard the nucleus of the ovum as mere matter, as atoms—substance. It is not that; it is both below and above it. The nucleus is a sac of ions, cohesive and adhesive, male and female, gathered from the life of the parents. Cohesion is life. It is the function of these ions to gather the atoms out of the blood and food and to build up the body. Each ion, while it remains, is a lord and an architect; it gathers its own particular atoms. Thus you have hair, nails, muscles, bone, what not. It comes from the life of the parent, from the Soul, which is a sort of amoeba. Science teaches that the amoeba subdivides always; and goes on unending. Religion tells you that the Soul is immortal. Both are true. Only they are one and the same thing. The Soul is an amoeba, subdividing always, passing on, eternal. I have spent my years upon the comet, experimenting with life. I have been able to isolate its functions and to hold them. I have gathered enough to build up two bodies."

"'He pointed to a shelf.

"'"Pass me down the package of foil yonder.

"'"There now," he held it up, "if ever you wish to make the experiment with the comet, all you have to do is to take what you find in these vials. Take one. And then wait. You will see the outside of the Universe. What happens to you and the comet will be in inverse ratio. You will grow and the comet will diminish. You shall know!"

"'That was all that he told me.

"'He was very weak and lay back, suddenly, upon the pillows, overcome with exertion. He lay still. With a great deal of awe and reverence, I withdrew.

"'Outside I ran into Sora. She was standing by the door. She had been listening. Though it was an honest bit of eavesdrooping, I did not know what it would come to. She touched her finger to her lips as if cautioning silence. Then she entered the room.

"'The old astronomer never spoke more. Perhaps the exertion hastened

his end. In three days he died. We buried him beside his wrecked ether ship. Over his grave we planted a cross with the words:

ZIN OF ZAR
Astronomer and Star Rover

CHAPTER NINE

"'THE Great Zin had told me enough of his story to furnish me with thought for a lifetime. Henceforth the comet had new meaning. My theory had been confirmed.

"'I watched the path that led up the mountain; at its end lay the secret of all things. I longed to go up and throw the lever that would destroy the comet's cohesion. It would then be an ion gone mad!

"'What would happen? What would be the end!

"'And there was another who also thought.

"'"Are all men astronomers?" she asked. "Do all men just dream of the stars; and spend all of their time trying to find out what they are; and how to go through them?"

"'"Why do you ask?"

"'"Because, my father was an astronomer. He was the only man I knew before you came. Now you are here, and you, too, think all the time of the stars. Oh, what are they like!"

"'"What?"

"'"The Stars? They must be wonderful! How I would like to see them! I would like to be on Zar, or on the Earth. Just think! Zar is a hundred thousand miles around, and you say that your Earth is thousands of miles across. And I've got to stay on this old comet. I just hate it. All it's got is that terrible rim, and that horrid old coma. What are the stars like?"

"'I tried to tell her. While I described the heavens, she sat still, dreaming; her eyes were full of wonder, and I could see that her imagination was wandering into fairyland.

"'I left her and entered the house. I wished to look at the cometary clock. I had been keeping an exact tab on its movement. Next to Sora's eyes, it was the most fascinating thing upon the nucleus. I liked to watch it as it registered the comet's course out into Infinity. Sora was outside. After a bit, I picked up a parchment written in the script of Zar and tried to decipher it.

"'And then—

"'It came suddenly. A quiver, a moan and a rumble. The building rocked! I was thrown from my feet and lurched headlong into the side wall! A roar of terrific and almost continuous explosions!

"'Then silence. A silence like death!

"'It was the lake. The heart of the nucleus had broken into the rim! It could be nothing else. I thought of Sora, and I rushed outside.

"'She was leaping down the mountain side, her golden hair streaming, her little beautiful form like that of a fleeting nymph. The mountain rocked, and huge crags came toppling down about her. She dodged them, and ran in and out and leaped over bowlders, down, down, down!

"'I rushed to meet her. When she reached the level I caught her in my arms.

"'"Sora! Sora! What have you done!"

"'She threw her arms about my neck; with the other hand she pointed at the crest of the mountain.

"'"Oh, Alvas," she spoke, "I have done what my father said. He lived all his life without doing what he dreamed of doing. All because of me. And you are an astronomer like Zin, my father. Love is sacrifice. I love you. You wish to solve the stars! I want to see them! I hate this old comet! Let us go into the house and do as father said. Let us take the vials!"

"'It was a lurid moment.

"'The nucleus had become a solid wall of crimson. The coma above us was as thick as blood. We were in the center of a thing that had never been in the memory of man. The comet was running mad. We were riding a thing as swift as thought. There was no time to lose.

"'Together, we rushed into the house. We seized the vials and brought them to the open light. I have a dim recollection of the great clock and of the indicator rushing over the wall as if it had suddenly gone wild. I remember Sora holding up the vial and my doing the same. We were clasped in each other's arms.

"'And then—

"'I have no idea of the lapse of time, nor what happened after that. The first I knew was Sora in my arms, her frightened face looking up into mine, and her finger held aloft. She was pointing at the sky—or at least, where a sky should be.

"'We were under an immense roof of semi-transparent material, a roof that was curved like a bow, and which projected from immense cliffs of pinkish material that rose to meet it. The ground under our feet was the same substance as the cliffs. As I looked, the roof seemed to drop, to sway, and to come down to meet us. I turned about.

"'In front of us was a vast open space like a gulf. The pink floor at our feet ran out to the rim of this abyss. When I looked again at the roof it was almost upon our heads. Either it was coming down or we were growing up to meet it.

"'Sora screamed. I acted upon impulse. With the maiden in my arms, I ran to the rim of the abyss. The ground under my feet was pink and furrowed, and yet as smooth as glass. It was the strangest substance I had ever encountered. At the very rim I stopped and looked back. The roof sank down, lower, lower, until it lay under our feet and, instead of being a roof, became a floor that ran out like a vast plateau.

"I looked down into the gulf where we had stopped. I shuddered; it was like gazing down into chaos! Rover that I was, and adventurer, it gave me a chill that I shall never forget. I felt Sora's arm tighten about my neck. We were growing.

"'There was nothing to do but seek the plateau of flat substance. I was afraid of the rim. I planted my feet upon the smooth surface and ran for the center.

"'But even that did not save us. Everything appeared to be diminishing. The strange semi-transparent material that had appeared to be a roof when we were under it, and a plateau when we were beside it, began, as soon as we were upon it, to grow smaller and smaller. At least, that was the feeling.

"'But I knew that it was not so. We were growing at an incredible rate. In a moment the plateau had shrunken to a spot upon which I could scarcely balance. On all sides, about us, were vast unguessable depths. To save ourselves from falling I had to slip down and hold myself astraddle of the support that held us. I placed Sora in front of me, and held her against my breast. I tried to see and to discover what was going on about us. Again Sora screamed. She pointed up, and called:

"'"Oh, Alvas, look; What is it? What can it be?"

"'We were gazing up into two of the most beautiful things I had ever seen—two shining circles of wonderful glowing color. And then I looked again. I felt Sora's fingers close upon my arm. I heard her gasp. The wonderful lights were eyes! The eyes of a human being! I could see the face.

"'Then I heard a wonderful sound. The air was pierced by thunder—superlaughter! Next minute we were being borne across the depths. I was hard put

(Continued on page 84)

An Odd Little Tale That You Can Read in Five Minutes

THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN

By A. HAVDAL

DANIEL DIGGS, the honest sexton, had dug three graves today and was unusually tired. One of the graves was in very stony ground, making his task doubly hard. It was the grave of an old recluse.

"Hard and stony was his life, and hard and stony is his grave," thought the worthy Mr. Diggs. For gravity must be expected from grave diggers.

This recluse had lived in a tumbled-down shanty near the cemetery, no one knew or cared how long. How he managed to subsist, no one knew or cared. Children called him "Old Man Simon," but grown-ups generally called him "Simple Simon." Whether "Simon" was his first or last name, no one knew or cared.

Mr. Diggs, who was of a pious mind, had on several occasions tried to turn old Simon's thoughts to religion, but his exhortations fell on stony ground. Old Simon cared nothing for the sexton's preachments; but he was very fond of the sexton's little boy, Danny.

"You come to see if old Simon has any gold in his house," the recluse would say to Mr. Diggs. "Simon has no gold." And then the foolish old man wept.

"Danny," he would say to the sexton's lad, "when old Simon dies, he will take you with him and show you a tree with golden leaves." And the foolish old man laughed. "A tree with golden leaves! With golden leaves!" Little Danny would open his eyes wide.

Yesterday morning Mr. Diggs had walked past old Simon's hut, and had seen the old man sitting by the window. In the evening he passed by again, and the old man was still sitting by the window in the same position. The sexton entered the hut, but the old man did not stir. The dead never do.

As soon as it became known in the village that the old hermit was dead, there was a rush of people to the hut. Does not everybody love to believe that all hermits are rich old misers with stacks of gold hidden in their huts? In less than half an hour, the gold seekers had literally torn the hut to pieces, but not a piece of gold did they find.

Mr. Diggs had dug the hermit's grave beside a big tree underneath which old Simon had loved to sit by the hour. During the summer when the weather was fine, the demented old man would sometimes climb up into the tree and sleep in the branches all night. To passersby on the road, he looked like a great shaggy orang-outang huddled up in the branches of the tree.

Mr. Diggs laid down his pick, took up his empty dinner pail, and started for home. The dinner pail was not quite empty—he had left a piece of cake in it, as usual, for Danny. The little boy always came running down to the gate to meet his father and to relieve him of his dinner pail.

Yesterday, for the first time, Mr. Diggs absent-mindedly had eaten everything in his pail, forgetting to leave a dainty for Master Diggs. When he noticed it, he was quite distressed and not wishing to disappoint the child with an empty dinner pail, he had plucked a beautiful red rose from a grave and carried it home in the pail. The sexton had felt that it was not quite right for him to pick the flower, but he had soothed his conscience by telling himself that he would never do it again.

The child was more than pleased with the flower and even pinned it on his nightgown when he went to bed.

Mr. Diggs had now walked down to the cemetery gate, and as he turned to open it, he saw a small white figure dancing around old Simon's open grave. A flaming red rose was pinned on the white gown.

"Danny; Danny! What do you mean?" cried Mr. Diggs. The sexton dropped his pail, and ran as fast as his rheumatic legs would carry him, to the grave.

No Danny was there; but a small empty, white nightgown with a gorgeous red rose fastened on it, was dangling over the grave. Mr. Diggs was not superstitious (he had worked among tombstones for twenty years without seeing a ghost), but now he rubbed his eyes and trembled. As the white gown floated over Simon's grave, the rose became unfastened and the wind whirled it away, but the gown fell into the open grave.

"My boy is dead!" cried the terrified sexton. "It is a sign from heaven!"

He ran like mad down the road to his cottage. When he reached his home, no Danny met him at the gate. He burst into the house and cried out, "Where is Danny?"

"Why, Danny went down the road an hour ago to meet you," his wife answered, terribly frightened.

"He is dead! He is dead!" moaned the sexton. "I saw his ghost!"

"No, no," said his wife. Although deathly pale herself, she tried to calm him.

Mr. Diggs told his wife of the white empty gown which he saw dancing over old Simon's empty grave. Though neither spoke of it, they both thought of the old hermit's words:

"Danny, when I die I will take you with me, and show you a tree with golden leaves."

"We must go to the cemetery," his wife said tremblingly.

They started down the road together, but the wife outran her husband, and reached the cemetery first. She rushed to the open grave and looked down. There was little Danny's nightgown! The mother was almost beside herself.

"Wicked old Simon! What have you done with my boy?" she wept.

She was answered by a great shaking and breaking of branches of the big tree beside the grave. She was too terrified to look up. Had old Simon returned to life and climbed up into the tree?

Mr. Diggs now came panting to the grave. There was another crashing and breaking of branches and little Danny came sliding down the tree trunk with a big leather bag on his shoulder.

"Look what I got, Ma! Look what I got, Pa!" shouted Danny. "A bag of gold money!"

"Where did you get it? Where have you been?" chorused his parents.

"Oh, but I scared you, Pa!" laughed Danny, jumping up and down. "And you didn't see me hiding up in the tree. I tied my nightgown on a string and was waving it over the grave."

"How could you do such a thing, Danny?" asked his father sternly.

"Don't you know it's April Fool's Day and my birthday and everything?" questioned Danny.

His father opened up the leather bag. "Impossible!" he gasped. "Gold dollars! *Gold dollars!*"

Danny explained how he had found the bag hidden in a hollow far up in the trunk of the tree in which he was hiding. The hollow was overgrown with moss, but when climbing down, he had put his

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A "Creepy" Story Told in a Quaint Way
By Arthur Edwards Chapman

THE INN OF DREAD

"TAKE care, Owens," I remember I had said to him, "for mine host tells me that the road hath fallen into bad repute of late; though, truth to tell, 'twas never what one might call well-favored!" And I had laughed, and he with me.

The pair of us had but just returned from the campaign on the peninsula, and, I having some business of a private nature to look to in Bristol, it was decided that the major should proceed to Bath and there await me. Knowing, from the conversation of mine host of the "Woolpack" the previous night, the unsettled state of the highway, I had taken the opportunity of placing my friend on his guard ere he commenced the journey.

"Never fear, John," he had replied carelessly. "I am a soldier, remember, and take no count of common footpads!"

"None-the-less 'tis for you to ride warily, for a blow in the dark is easily struck. Besides, you have my lady's diamonds and those, added to what you yourself carry, form a tempting haul to any knight of the road."

"Never fear," he had said again; "they will not find Howel Owens asleep. . . Farewell till we meet in Bath!"

Mounting, he had waved lightly to me and ridden off, leaving me gazing after him with doubt in my heart, for I liked not the tales I had heard.

And thus it was that on the third day after this, having transacted my business satisfactorily, I found myself struggling blindly against what surely must have been the foulest storm since the creation—or so it seemed to me.

In all truth, 'twas a wretched night. The wind howled and whistled through the naked branches of the trees, which seemed to complain one to the other with great creakings and groanings; the rain drove before it in a beating, soaking deluge, *pit-pit-patting* on the mud of the road around me; the thunder rolled and growled in the distance, coming gradually nearer and louder till it burst overhead with a reverberating, earsplitting crash to the accompaniment of blinding flashes of lightning that revealed the whole dreary, sodden landscape.

A truly wild and terrible night, and one that not even a dog would be out in of its own free will. And yet here was

I, Colonel John Wykeham, of His Majesty's —rd Regiment of Foot, plodding on through it all, ankle deep in mud, and, it would appear, miles from even the outskirts of civilization, when by good rights I should have been seated before a blazing fire in the best house in all Bath, soaking the inside with the choice of mine host's cellars rather than soaking outside in this plaguey storm.

Damn the Frenchman! He was responsible. You see, the mare had received a bullet at Badajos, and the wound, breaking out afresh, had been the cause of us landing in this pretty pickle.

However, 'twas no use crying over spilt milk. We must perforce make the best of bad luck and what progress we could against the elements. We might, perchance, discover some lonely farmhouse, or even (cheering thought) some wayside inn that would at least afford shelter for the pair of us.

Now scarce had this thought crossed my mind than in front of me, some distance up the road, my eye caught a tiny twinkling spot which might have been a star, but that there were no others visible. The Shepherds of Bethlehem could not have welcomed the guiding Star more than I welcomed that point of light, and with a word of encouragement to the mare, I pressed forward with renewed hope.

Gradually the beacon became larger and assumed a definite shape—a square latticed window. Then, as the rain beat down with increased fury, and the thunder rolled more and more deafeningly, a flash of lightning, more vivid and more intensely blue than any as yet, pierced the blackness like a knife, giving me a brief glimpse of an old, weather-beaten building, and above the door a signboard that creaked dismally as it swung in the wind.

But it was the inscription that caused an unexplainable, indescribable shiver to run swiftly down my spine, which immediately gave place to a clammy, heated perspiration, and I trembled— I, John Wykeham, who had passed through the greatest battles of the campaign without turning a hair, trembled like a little child with an awful, nameless dread as I beheld the words: "The Bleeding Heart," and, beneath, a crude design of a heart dripping blood.

This I saw for merely a second, and then it vanished, leaving me standing there, a pale phosphorescent glow floating before my eyes, until a cold hand touched mine and took the bridle from me.

With an effort, I pulled myself together, and as my vision slowly became clearer I could distinguish a figure, exceedingly tall and thin, that, when I addressed it, simply shook its head and pointed to its ears and mouth.

Motioning me to follow, this strange guide led the way to what had once been a serviceable stable, but which was now sorely in need of repair. Having seen to it that the mare was provided for, and washed and dressed her wound as well as might be, I returned and entered the doorway of the inn.

"A rough night and a wet, sir, is't not?" said a deep rasping voice at my elbow.

I turned suddenly at the words, thinking to see some big, bluff personage. But what I did see was the direct antithesis of the voice in a small, undersized hunchback who stood before me, rubbing his thin hands together and staring at me with a smile half servile, half sardonic upon his lips.

And as I gazed at this creature the same unaccountable feeling of revulsion passed over me as when the lightning revealed that sign of the "Bleeding Heart," for his eyes were green and seemed to look right through me as at the shades of departed souls.

In fact, so strong was this feeling that instinctively I glanced over my shoulder, expecting to see I know not what. But there was naught but impenetrable darkness and the *pit-pit-pat* of rain which brought me back to the present and reminded me that I was wet and hungry, while a huge fire blazed on the open hearth within.

"Damme, host," said I, "you're right. 'Tis as evil a night as I remember. Quickly; bring out of your best, for I'm famished an' chilled to the very marrow."

"You shall have it, sir," he replied. "'Tis plain fare, truly, for 'tis rarely now that these walls see company, but none-the-less 'tis wholesome, and the contents of my cellars are not to be surpassed."

The green eyes peered through me as he spoke, and then he shuffled slowly from the room, while I, casting off my dripping cloak and discarding my long riding-boots, stretched my body at full length in the big arm-chair and cast about me to see what manner of place I had come to.

The room was nigh as tumbledown as the outside had appeared to be. It was roughly square, but was broken by many corners and recesses into the shadows of which the feeble light of the candles could not penetrate. The single window was minus many of its diamond panes, and what remained were cracked and broken, admitting fierce gusts of air which caused the candles to gutter noisily. There was about the place a peculiar earthy smell, a mouldering smell indicative of neglect and decay, but which, to my overstrained senses, conveyed the impression of a newly-opened tomb.

Somewhere without, the water dripped from the roof on to some metal article with a hollow, ringing *plom-plom-plom*, so that I was fain to draw my chair nearer to the fire and was right glad when the innkeeper returned, bringing food and drink, plain, as he had said, but wholesome, and I fell to heartily.

Now as I proceeded to satisfy the need of the inner man, what should that knave of a hunchback do but take up from the table, where I had laid them, my sword and pistols.

"Ho, there, rascal!" I bellowed, springing up. "What are you at, think you? Replace them at once, ere I knock that hump from your back!"

"Nay, sir," said he, dropping the things as though they burnt him, "I meant no harm. I was but going to convey them to your chamber as is my custom with what few guests come this way."

"Well, well, 'tis all right; there's no bones broken," I assured him, sinking down again. "But long companionship with danger makes an old campaigner wary of parting with his best friends." And I arranged the weapons carefully at my elbow.

"I did not think at the moment, sir," said the fellow apologetically, "for 'tis rare any traveler stops at this poor place."

I wondered at the man's persistence, for 'twas the third time he had referred to his lack of trade. Why should he be so particular to impress this fact upon me?

"Your business is not so prosperous these days?" I asked him.

"No, sir; yours is the first strange foot that has trod this floor this six days."

I looked at the fellow hardly as he said this, for my eye, wandering round the room, had espied at that instant, on a little shelf to the left of the fire-place, a pistol of peculiar workmanship, the like of which I had seen but once before in the possession of my friend and brother officer, Major Owens. Yet, if it were his, how did it come here? Certainly he had passed along this road three days before on his way to Bath, where I should have met him this very night, but he could not have stayed here, for did not the inn-keeper himself say that

no stranger had set foot in the place for six days?

None-the-less I was not satisfied with this reasoning, and a sudden suspicion flashing across my mind, I got up from the table and stepped over to the shelf.

"You're not minus a sting, host," said I, taking up the weapon and weighing it carefully in my hand.

"No—," he answered slowly, and his green eyes contracted like those of a cat in the strong light till they were little more than slits. "The toy is not mine, but was left accidentally by a traveler some weeks ago. Mine has a louder bark." And he pointed to a large blunderbuss that hung on the wall.

Then I knew that the knave lied, for on the butt of the pistol I had seen the letters "H. O."

Slowly I replaced it on the shelf, carelessly remarking that the man who left it behind was no soldier. But I was thinking rapidly, and, as I thought, the horror of the place returned and the previous suspicion gave place to dreadful certainty. I became convinced that the major had met with foul play, and several little incidents of which I had not taken much note now became full of awful significance. The fact of the inn being open at that late hour now savored of a trap. Then there was the deafness of the tall man. Anything might happen and he would not hear it.

And again, why was the hunchback so desirous of carrying off my weapons? Or why tell a deliberate lie if he were an honest man? Here was a mystery which I determined to get to the bottom of, and heaven help the villain if my fears proved correct! Quickly I decided on a course of action.

"Well, host," said I, "'tis a rare vintage of yours, an' I should sleep well upon it for I'm mightily tired."

Pulling out my purse so that it jangled noisily, I poured some of the contents into my palm and carelessly picked out a couple of crowns. These I flung upon the table, watching the rogue narrowly the while.

He scarce gave a glance at the coins I had given him, but his eyes feasted on the bulky purse and glittered with a greedy light, and, minding the jewels which Owens carried, I could no longer doubt.

"There," said I, "take those for the nonce, an' if I sleep sound you shall have more. Now show me to my chamber an' I will go to bed."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. You do my poor hospitality honor." And again that sardonic smile so full of unfathomable meaning. "This way, sir, this way," he continued. "'Tis a soft, clean bed as you will find."

I followed him up a rickety, creaking staircase, terminating in a small landing with a door on either side and a small window facing us. One of these doors he opened.

"There you are, sir," said he. "Now I will leave you and retire myself, for the hour is late. I trust you will sleep well. Never yet have I had a complaint from any who occupied this chamber; indeed, all have slept exceeding sound."

Putting the candle on a small dressing-stand, he looked through me once with his cat's eyes, and I was alone.

Alone! Yes. But sleep? No. Nothing was farther from me, for I was wrestling with this great problem that faced me. I felt perfectly sure that this inn of dread contained the secrets of a tragedy, if not of tragedies, and was determined to search them out. To my mind the place was but a trap for the unwary traveler. Surely there was something horribly, suggestively sinister in those parting words of the hunchback: "*Indeed, all have slept exceeding sound.*"

With a grim smile, I took up my position on a chair behind the door so that if it opened I should be hid from view, and placed my drawn sword across my knees and my pistol ready in my hand. I should not sleep! Here I would wait until all was quiet, and if no one came to disturb me I should have to go and disturb them. First I would search the building for any further evidence of Owens' fate. If nothing was to be discovered then that rascally inn-keeper should explain how he came to be in possession of that pistol.

I know not how long I sat thus, but on a sudden my nerves were set all of a tingle by a great cry as of someone in mortal terror and physical anguish, and yet having in it a note of grim triumph.

For an instant I remained still, my heart beating a rapid tattoo against my ribs and something of my old horror of the place returning. Then, my sword firmly grasped in one hand and pistol in the other, I cautiously opened the door and stepped out on to the landing.

The bright, full moon had risen, and, revealed in its pale ray was the diminutive figure of the hunchback. He was clad only in his night-shirt, and the green eyes were closed, while from his lips issued broken, half-audible sentences.

". . . The knife. . . I must have it. . . . How sticky his blood is. . . *he, he, he!*" came in low, hollow tones, and I strained my ears to catch more.

"Sh. . . he sleeps. . . One swift stroke, and who is the wiser?" And again that horrible chuckle that made my blood run cold.

Once more the sleepwalker's lips moved as his still active brain conjured up some fresh vision of his crime:

". . . Silently, quickly and the purse is mine. . . How quiet he lies. . . But the knife is sharp, so sharp. . . *ho, ho, ho!* . . . See, his eyes are open; he sees. . . but it is too late. . . One swift stroke and one only. . . Ah—h!"

I shuddered at the awful significance of his words, and could hardly keep myself from springing upon the self-convicted murderer, for here seemed to be the confirmation of my suspicions. But as I hesitated the sleepwalker spoke again:

"There, 'tis done. . . He was quiet before, but he is quieter now. . . *he, he!* . . . The pretty stones. . . how they sparkle! Why should he have them and me nothing? . . . But now they are mine—all mine. *Ho, ho!* . . . 'Tis a fat purse, also. . . how it jingles. . . He sleeps sound. . . where shall his bed be? . . . Beneath the stair! . . . The knife . . . I must have it. . ."

Slowly the sleepwalker moved, turning his head neither to right nor left. Outside the water dripped with that ringing, metallic sound which I have mentioned. The sleeper must have heard it, for he stopped and appeared to listen.

"How sticky his blood is. . . hark! . . . drip, drip, drip. . . Blood. . . . everywhere is blood. . . Where is the knife? . . . I must get it. . ."

And he glided silently down the creaking, shaking stair.

Gripping my weapons firmly, I followed, swiftly, relentlessly, as a cat follows a mouse. At the bottom he went on his knees and commenced to prize up the floor-boards with his fingers. Three planks did he take up as I watched, and again there assailed my nostrils the mouldy, decaying smell. Filled with deadly fear, I sprang forward and my startled gaze fell upon the body of my poor friend lying between the scantlings, a large knife buried up to the handle in his breast, while the sleepwalker, chuckling hideously, strove to pull it free.

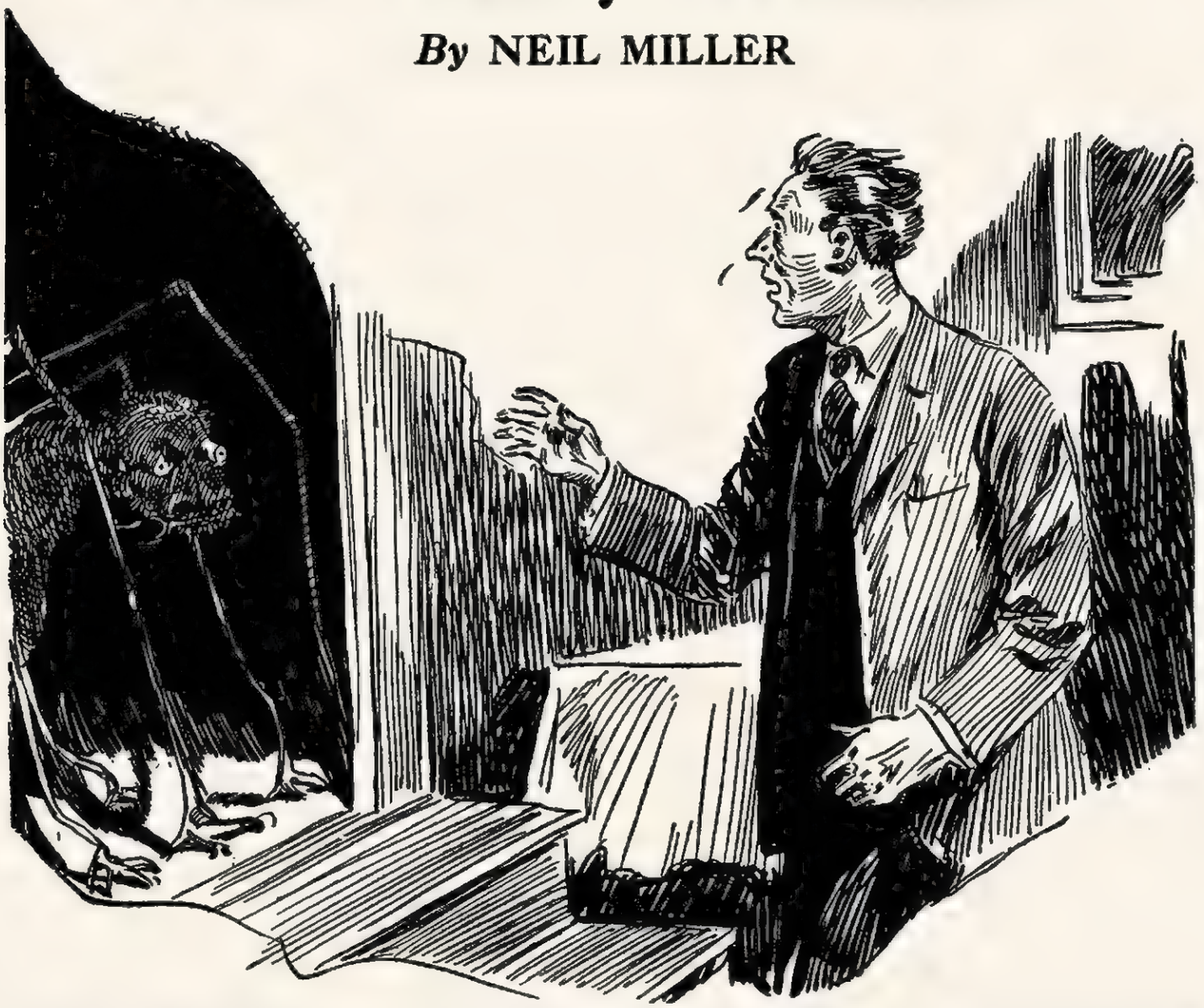
A blind, unreasoning fury swept over me; I became for an instant as a madman. Leaping upon the vile monster I seized him by the throat and drove my sword again and again, wildly, fiercely, into his body so that he fell, without a cry, across the corpse of his victim, his life-blood spurting forth from his black heart and mingling with the dust.

Then, pausing not an instant, I turned and fled from the accursed place and breathed not till it was far behind.

Stark Terror is the Keynote of This Strange Tale

The Hairy Monster

By NEIL MILLER



I AM not a scientific or learned man. If I were, perhaps I might be able to set down the events which I am about to chronicle in such a manner as would be of enormous value to the scientific world.

Had the events which I am about to relate been witnessed by a man possessed of a knowledge of science, the world would undoubtedly have been made richer by the passing of Doctor Carrol. For then we would have a true explanation of all that took place within the mysterious laboratory which he had fitted up for himself. We would then have a solution of the most mystifying series of circumstances which I have ever heard of.

Alas, that I alone know all the absolute facts surrounding the affair! And I alone, of all the world, am perhaps the man least fitted for the task of setting them down.

For, as I have stated, I know nothing of science or of the principles involved in the doctor's experiments. The best I can do is to write down the actual occurrences in the best way I know, and permit my reader to draw his own conclusions. Were I a writer of fiction, the reading of what is to follow might have been made much more pleasurable—but then, perhaps, I might have yielded to the temptation, which I have found to be very common to writers, to polish up and gloss over certain occurrences which took place, with a view of making them more thrilling and interesting. The events themselves are thrilling enough, and if you do not find them interesting the fault lies only in my meager ability to relate what I know to be the absolute facts.

Why Doctor Carrol, with his host of scientific friends, should ever have taken a fancy to me, is more than I have ever been able to figure out. Certainly I am not one who would attract attention from such a learned man as he. In fact, I was but a servant of the doctor's—yet at times he treated me with more courtesy than he did his colleagues in science.

I was his gardener, with a little cottage of my own on the edge of his estate; and

very often in the evening the doctor would drop in for a quiet smoke and a few minutes' conversation. And on one or two occasions I have known of his actually deserting a learned company of savants, to come to my cottage and converse with me.

Naturally, I believe that Doctor Carrol thought a great deal of me; and I would have died for him.

I think his eyes were the most noticeable thing about him. Strange, magnetic eyes they were; which, when one once looked into them, seemed to possess the property of holding his gaze until the doctor chose to look away. Hypnotic, I guess you would call it. Certainly no man could ever forget the eyes of Doctor Carrol.

And because I could never forget the eyes of my master, a group of analysts judged me insane! Bah! They do not know what I know—and probably never will.

From time to time, the learned doctor had been engaged in scientific experiments. Though I never did know the complete details of those experiments, I did know that the doctor held an enviable place in the world of science, and that he was the author of several books which had caused sensational stirs among his fellow scientists. In fact, I was at all times impressed with the depth of the doctor's learning.

And I never ceased to marvel at the things he sometimes showed me in his laboratory. Horrible, grotesque, and sometimes seemingly supernatural were the things which he brought before my attention. Had I been superstitious or of weak heart, I know that I would long ago have died of the horrors which he showed me.

But the calm, precise doctor often complimented me by saying that I was able to see such things in the calm, dispassionate light with which all scientists must view their experiments. Thus encouraged, I continued my infrequent visits to the laboratory and endeavored to manifest an enthusiasm for the horrible and eerie things which he showed me; though often, after seeing some of his terrible creations, I would return to my hut, and lie awake all night long, too shaken by the sights I had witnessed to go to sleep.

The result of the doctor's last experiment, however, made such a deep impression upon me that for three months after, I was confined to the violent ward of the state hospital, with the attendants despairing of ever restoring my sanity.

IT WAS in the latter part of May that I first began to miss the doctor from his accustomed haunts. No longer did he come down to my cottage in the evening for a quiet smoke and a few minutes' chat. From Mr. Barton, the doctor's son-in-law, I learned that he was spending most of his time in the concrete laboratory; appearing at the house only for his meals and to snatch a few hours sleep.

"It is something big he is working on this time," said Mr. Barton. "He won't let any of us go near the laboratory—not even Bessie. When he does appear at the house, it is only to snatch a bite to eat, or to doze for a moment. Then he is all haste to get back to the laboratory. And he is so nervous and excited; I swear that I have never seen him so enthusiastic over an experiment. We'll see a lot of excitement around here when he finally throws open the door of the laboratory and invites his friends out to see what he has done."

Remembering some of the things I had seen within the grim walls of the laboratory, I could not restrain a shudder. But as days passed, I found that a certain morbid curiosity seemed to be continually drawing me toward the laboratory, in the hope that I might gain an inkling as to what was going on behind those closely-barred windows.

That it was something to strike fear to the heart of mortal man, I well knew—yet I could not keep away from the place. Then the doctor disappeared entirely, and I learned that he was having his meals sent out to him, and was spending both days and nights within the walls of the laboratory.

About a month after the doctor had shut himself up in the concrete laboratory I had been working on the far side of the estate, and at sunset, as I turned my steps toward my cottage, I met Mr. Barton. He fell into step beside me and walked to my door. I knew at once that the young man was deeply worried about something, and though he spoke no word as we walked along, I knew that he wanted to confide in me. But I held my peace.

At last we left the shadowy woods and came out upon the concrete driveway which led to the house and the laboratory. For a time, we walked along, the only sound being the crunch of our feet on the gravel, which a recent rain had washed down. I was vainly trying to arrive at some conclusion as to what had so disturbed my young companion, when, suddenly, I stopped and stared in horror at a spot on the pavement. There, gleaming in the setting sun, lay a large pool of fresh blood!

Barton saw it about the same time I did; and I noticed that he shuddered. Then, as though desiring to lose sight of the crimson pool, he quickened his pace.

"Blood!" he muttered as though to himself. "Fresh blood every day, always at the same time—and every day there is more of it!"

"What's that, sir?" I asked respectfully.

He stopped suddenly and seized my sleeve.

"Greening," he said nervously, "this thing is getting on my nerves, and I've simply got to have someone to talk to. You saw that pool of blood back there; but do you know what it means?"

I admitted that I did not.

"I only wish I did," he said. "I do know that day after day the doctor has been receiving ever increasing quantities of blood. At first, it was only a quart; then it was a gallon. Today—" here, he lowered his voice—"today, it was *ten* gallons!"

"It probably has something to do with his experiments," I said with attempted lightness. "I have known of him having stranger things than blood in that old laboratory."

"What kind of an experiment can he be conducting which requires ten gallons of blood every day?" demanded Mr. Barton. "I tell you, man, I'm afraid. I have a feeling that something is going to happen! Something terrible!"

At last he left me, still muttering that something terrible was about to happen. For a long time after he had gone, I sat alone on the veranda of my cottage, watching the bright red glow of the western sky. Red—red like blood. And then I shuddered—why, I know not.

I do not think I had been influenced by Mr. Barton's fears—indeed, I had almost forgotten them. But suddenly there had come over me an overwhelming premonition of impending disaster. Though the night was hot and sultry, I felt suddenly cold and afraid. Thinking to lose this feeling of depression, I rose and entered the house. Inside, with the lights switched on, things began to assume a more cheerful aspect. Indeed, I managed to laugh at my fears, which seemed so groundless.

Would to God that I had heeded them!

AT LAST, as the clock struck twelve, I rose and began to prepare for bed.

After extinguishing the light, I stepped out onto the veranda, and looked up the driveway toward the laboratory. The night was hot and sultry, with promise of rain before the morrow. Light, scudding clouds raced across the sky, at times entirely obscuring the moon. I no-

ticed that the doctor had thrown open one of the big steel shutters, probably to gain air. Satisfied that all was well, I re-entered my cottage and promptly went to bed.

Sleep was long in coming, and when at last I drifted into a restless slumber my sleep was disturbed by a terrible dream in which I seemed to be drowning in an ocean of blood. Above me, the strange, magnetic eyes of the doctor smiled cryptically and seemed to hold me with their hypnotic power above the eddying currents which endeavored to engulf me.

I awoke, gasping for breath and sweating from every pore of my body, and possessed of such a feeling of horror as I had never known before. For a time, I could not believe that the whole thing had been but a terrible dream. The billows of blood still seemed to surge about me— and there, directly above my bed, shone a pair of round, luminous eyes! How long I stared at them, too shaken to move, I do not know. It seemed an eternity that those two awful eyes glared unblinkingly into mine as I lay, trembling and impotent.

Then, suddenly, the thing dropped upon me! I was instantly smothered beneath the horrible, clawing thing. The soft, yielding, hair-covered body seemed to weight me down, while the unspeakable stench sickened and suffocated me. Great, sinewy arms, at least a dozen in number, wrapped themselves about my body as though in an effort to crush me to death.

I felt the hot, stagnant breath of the beast close to my face, and realized that the murderous jaws were ever drawing nearer to my throat. In vain did I rain blows upon the body of the creature. Though at times my fists sank deeply into the flesh, they made no impression. At last, with the final remnant of my rapidly ebbing energy, I managed to roll over and throw the beast to the floor.

There followed a sound of confused scuffling, and a moment later I caught sight of a large shadow at the window. The accursed thing had gone!

For several minutes I lay on my back, striving to get back my breath and strength. Then I rose unsteadily to my feet, switched on the lights, and, securing a shotgun which I always kept handy, I stepped outside, with the view of pursuing this ungodly creature.

I must have slept longer than I thought, for the sky was now completely overcast; and off in the west lightning flashed incessantly. The rumble of thunder and the freshening breeze gave promise of rain in a very short time. Though the obscuring of the moon had deprived me of a very powerful ally, I was determined to sleep no more that night until I had found the beast.

Attracted by the dim light which still glowed in the laboratory, I made my way toward it and peered in through the open window. There, so close that I could have touched him had I cared to reach through the bars, sat the doctor. He had his back turned toward the window and was bending over his desk, writing.

Apparently, there was nothing wrong here—except that the doctor was slowly wearing himself out with his experiment. I tarried there in the light from the open window. Somehow, after my ordeal with that terrible Thing, the proximity of another human seemed comforting. And as I stood there, watching the doctor writing away so quietly, I began to wonder if, perhaps, the whole thing had not been a terrible nightmare. Long I stood there, pondering on the question, and when I next looked at the doctor, his head had slumped down upon the desk, and the sound of his breathing told me that he slept.

Meanwhile, the storm had rapidly been drawing nearer. Great ragged ropes of fire flashed across the leaden sky, and the thunder rumbled. Even as I stood, mentally debating if I hadn't better dismiss my nocturnal visitor as a product of my imagination and go back to bed, the storm broke in all its fury. I was about to make a dash for the shelter of my cottage, when suddenly above the tumult of the storm I heard a shrill, unearthly scream, as of a mortal thing in deadly terror!

Instantly there surged into my mind a vision of that great, hairy, many-armed beast; and I raced away through the swirling rain toward the shadowy bulk of the house. Apparently others had heard the scream, for in the servants' quarters a light suddenly sprang into being. Other lights appeared, and I heard the sound of excited voices. Then, again, that horrifying scream!

Driven by a fear of I knew not what, I dashed through the house and up the broad stairway in front, to the rooms occupied by the doctor's daughter and her husband. A small group of excited servants had gathered in a hysterical group before the door and were making a vain effort to force it in. Even as we struggled with the heavy oaken door, the scream was repeated—very feebly this time. Burrows, the chauffeur, and I drew back and threw our combined weights against the door.

And then, as the massive panel crashed in, I saw a scene, the like of which I never wish to see again.

THE room was literally drenched in blood. On the floor lay the lifeless and horribly multilated body of Mr. Barton, while on the snowy expanse of the bed lay his wife. The throats of both had been terribly mangled, as though gnawed by some ferocious beast.

Everywhere about the room, the spatterings of blood gave mute, though tragic, testimony of the mighty struggle which had taken place. Burrows and I grimly drove the others away that they might not look upon the terrible sight. We dispatched the woman who had been the doctor's cook to the telephone, with instructions to notify the police and summon a physician — though I knew he could do nothing. Then, for a few moments, Burrows and I stood shuddering in the room of death. For my part, I was attempting to collect my wits and decide on what to do.

"Of course, who ever committed this terrible crime came and went through the open window," I remarked absently. "Since the only door to the room was securely locked from the inside, it is quite apparent that the murderer must have entered through the window."

"But it is a sheer drop of fifty feet!" remonstrated Burrows with a shudder.

I looked out the open window, and saw that he was right. Nor was there any visible means by which a person might raise himself up the smooth brick surface of the house.

"I tell you, no man did this," muttered Burrows between his chattering teeth. "It is the work of some damned beast. I read a story once by a guy called Poe, and that story told about two women who were murdered—by an ape!"

And suddenly I remembered that terrifying nightmare in my cottage. Could Burrows be right? Could it have been a gigantic ape which had attacked me and murdered this couple?

I shuddered at the thought—yet there instantly surged into my mind a thought even more terrifying—for now I knew that I had not dreamed about the creature. There, before me, lay the mute tragic testimony that the beast actually existed. But the many arms? Surely, no ape ever possessed such a number! But if not an ape—then what was it?

"I'll tell you what I think," said Burrows slowly, and with a visible effort to regain his self-possession. "I think it was some damned thing the doctor has been experimenting with. Some terrible monster. You know about the blood he has been getting?"

I nodded. Burrows leaned toward me and seized my sleeve nervously.

"I know what he has been doing with it," he whispered. "One day, the man from the abattoir did not come, and I had to drive in and bring it out. The doctor took the can inside the laboratory, and dumped the blood into a long trough—just like a hog trough. One end of it stuck out through a partition which the doctor had built across the laboratory. And as the blood ran down the trough, I heard a movement behind the partition, like some animal rushing to its feed."

"What sort of an animal?" I asked.

"What sort?" he echoed. "What sort of an animal do you expect to drink ten gallons of blood every day?"

And then a sudden thought struck me. "It couldn't have been that animal which committed this crime, whatever it was," I said. "At the time I heard the scream I was standing just outside the window of the laboratory. The doctor was awake when I first saw him, and therefore it would have been impossible for the beast to have escaped. As I stood there, the doctor went to sleep—but I was just outside the window, the only open one in the building, and would have seen anything which came out."

"Then who—or what did do it?" demanded Burrows.

"I don't know—but we are going to find out, if possible," I replied. "Get a gun, if you can find one, and join me outside. We will go, first, to the laboratory, to inform the doctor. Then we will search the grounds thoroughly."

Outside, the storm had increased in fury, and we had great difficulty in making our way through the driving rain to the laboratory. The brilliant flares of lightning intermittently revealed our surroundings as light as day, and the next instant we were plunged into darkness so deep that often we stumbled and fell. It seemed that all the elements of nature were against us, yet we persisted in our attempt to reach the doctor.

At last we succeeded in reaching the grim walls of the laboratory. Burrows raised the butt of his rifle and pounded loudly upon the steel door; then we waited impatiently for the doctor to open it. There was no response.

Again we beat upon the door, and, while Burrows waited, I made my way around the building to where I had seen the open shutter. A sudden clutch of dread seized my heart as I saw that it was closed. Of course, it would have been perfectly natural for the doctor to have closed it against the rain—but still I shuddered. Wondering and fearful, I made my way back to the door, where Burrows waited.

"He doesn't answer!" he shouted to me above the tumult of the storm.

Vainly did I try to reason with myself that nothing could have happened to the doctor, safe as he was behind those walls of solid concrete. A growing fear came over me that behind the unyielding steel door we would find another tragedy. And I was unable to throw the feeling off, even though I reasoned that the doctor had been sleeping when last I saw him, and that perhaps his sheer exhaustion or the fury of the storm made it impossible for him to hear our efforts to get in. At last I yielded to my fears and suggested that we break down the door.

"Do you think—" began Burrows chatteringly.

"I don't know," I replied. "But we are going to find out. I believe that it will be possible for us to remove the door from its hinges."

"Oh, why didn't I return to the city tonight?" moaned Burrows. "Blood—blood and murder. First, the doctor's daughter and her husband—now the doctor!"

"Shut up and bring some tools," I commanded gruffly. "I believe we will find the doctor perfectly well; but we must get to work."

Reluctantly, he went to the garage for tools, and we fell to work on the massive steel door. How long we labored I have no means of knowing, for we lost all account of the time in our frenzied efforts to reach our master.

At last we succeeded in driving out the last pin. A strong pull on the crowbar, and the immense steel door crashed to the ground, where the rain beat upon it relentlessly. There remained a wooden door which we must also force if we were to gain entrance to the doctor's workroom. This yielded quickly to our efforts, and then we paused, suddenly stricken with an unknown fear. For the place was in absolute darkness—like that of a tomb!

"Doctor Carrol!" I called nervously.

An empty, mocking echo from the vault was my only response. And then suddenly I knew that we would never find the doctor alive—that, for the second time that evening, I stood in the presence of a horrible and mysterious death.

Death—and something else! Some subtle intuition told me that in this vault of the dead was a living, breathing thing.

"For God's sake, get a flashlight!" I said huskily, as I took a firmer grip on my shotgun.

Burrows hastened away, to return a moment later with the desired article. Not without some misgivings, I stepped inside the building, directed the lamp toward the chair where I had last seen the doctor, and pressed the button.

I think I must have screamed at what I saw. There, by the window, his throat jaggedly torn from ear to ear, sat the lifeless body of the doctor. I had no doubt that the doctor had been attacked while he slept, and that the same beast which had killed his daughter and her husband had also slain the doctor. One peculiar thing impressed itself upon me; and that was the complete absence of blood. Nowhere about the doctor was there a drop to be seen, and this, in spite of the fact that his throat had been ripped and torn in a most fiendish manner.

Then I saw how it happened that the building was in total darkness. In death, the doctor's head had been thrown back against the wall, and, coming into contact with the switch, had broken the current.

Warning Burrows to keep a close watch, I took a firmer grip on my shotgun and entered the room. Tremblingly, I strode over to the lifeless body of the doctor, lifted his head, and switched on the lights. No sooner had they flashed on than I heard a horrible, terror-stricken scream from the doorway. Burrows had disappeared!

With a sudden clutch of dread upon my heart, I slowly wheeled about, reluctant to gaze upon the sight which must have driven Burrows screaming from the doorway. The thing I saw was even more hideous than my wildest imaginings had made it.

There, not ten feet distant from me, I beheld the most horrible creature ever seen upon this earth! Measuring fully six feet from head to tail, and possessing a head as large as my own, this creature suddenly raised itself upon its long, slender legs.

And then I realized for the first time what it was. In spite of its monstrous size, I quickly recognized it as a spider—a gigantic, horrible, grotesque spider!

I PRAY that never again may I be brought face to face with such a hideous parody on nature. How long I stood, staring in fascinated horror at this terrible monstrosity, I do not know. The body and the legs of the creature were literally saturated in fresh, smelly blood—the blood of Mr. Barton and his wife. With a shudder, I realized how closely I had escaped the fate which had overtaken the other two, and, last of all, the doctor. With a sudden rage against this blood-spattered murderer, I raised my

gun. And then, it raised its head, and I saw the eyes!

It was then that madness finally came over me. I screamed aloud in my terror, while the gun went clattering unheeded to the floor. I think I would have fled screaming from the building, had I not been held there by the spell of those eyes.

Master analysts have judged me to be insane, yet I know as surely as I know that I am alive that the thing which had taken the life of the doctor, had also taken something else. Something—I do not know what—unless it could have been his soul. For the eyes—the eyes of that abominable creature were undoubtedly the magnetic, unforgetable eyes of Doctor Carrol!

And in those eyes was such a look of horror as I have never seen, the look of a damned soul. Then, as those magnetic eyes gazed into mine, I fancied that the expression changed, that they seemed to be beseeching me mutely—trying vainly to break across the intervening gulf and convey some message to me.

This look gave way to one of disappointment. I wondered if it were possible that the doctor had been trying to communicate with me through the medium of those eyes, and was now disappointed because I was unable to read his thoughts. I never could decide. The expression changed quickly to one of utter dispair.

Then, slowly and deliberately, the great beast turned about and began to move across the room. At the wall, it paused and again looked toward me. From the grotesque head the eyes of the doctor stared at me, with an expression of horror—horror and something else. At first, I did not understand, but now, I know. Doctor Carrol was telling me good-bye!

An instant, and one of the long, ungainly legs reached up along the wall. Slowly, the beast raised itself to an upright position. Then, slowly, almost reluctantly, I fancied, one of the legs reached up to a shelf which hung upon the wall. While I waited, an immense jug came crashing down, spilling the contents all over the creature. A horrible odor of burning acid assailed my nostrils as the beast sank back to the floor, yet I stayed on—too horrified to move. Slowly, but surely, the all-destroying acid burned away the body of the beast.

I stood and impotently watched the death throes of the accursed thing, watched the slow destruction of the loathsome body, which in some unaccountable way held the soul of my master!

At last it was over. Where the spider had lain, nothing remained but a few shreds and a pool of discolored acid. I must have been totally insane as I tottered out through the open door of the laboratory, into the dawn of a new day, to babble to the police an incredible tale of a gigantic spider which possessed itself of the soul of a man. They told me that I was insane—that the spider's possession of the soul of a man was a product of my disordered imagination.

But the doctor's notebook, which we found in the laboratory, proves beyond a doubt that the creature existed, and, incredulous though they were, they were forced to believe that Mr. Barton, his wife and the doctor were all murdered by the creature. Only my statement that the soul of the doctor had, in some unaccountable way, entered into the body of the spider, they have steadfastly refused to believe. Yet, if it is not true—if the authorities are right in declaring such a thing to be impossible—then why did the creature deliberately destroy itself?

IN CLOSING, I will be as brief as possible, for my story is done, and except for a few comments on the doctor's notebook, there is nothing more to be said.

It appeared from the notebook that for some time the doctor had been interested in a theory that certain animals might be increased in size to a limit prescribed only by the desire of the experimenter. He had begun his experiment on a spider in preference to other creatures, on account of some technical reason which he carefully explained in the notebook, but which I did not understand.

Day by day, he traced the results of his attempt, from the time he first began his experiment, up to a very few minutes before his death. Although at the time he wrote it, the doctor could have had no idea of the fatal end of his experiment, he made this notation:

"It is quite apparent that I have made a miscalculation in arranging my daily feeding schedule. The amount of blood I have been feeding is proving woefully inadequate; and, to make matters worse, the man from the abattoir made a serious error in my order for today. The beast is growing much more rapidly than I had expected, and I fear that I am going to have serious trouble unless I can arrange to feed him early tomorrow morning. I must send Burrows to town as soon as possible, and have him bring out enough blood to feed him. I hesitate to think of what might happen should this powerful creature feel the pangs of hunger."

And there the manuscript ends, as I presume it ended when I, from my post of vantage outside the laboratory window, saw the doctor slump down upon his desk and fall asleep.

I have pondered considerably on the question of how the beast managed to escape while the doctor was seated within a few feet of the pen. And finally I arrived at a satisfactory solution, which is that the doctor had been in the habit of dropping off for a few moments sleep at irregular intervals, and that it was at one of these times that the spider made his escape.

An Uncanny Yarn About Devil Worshipers

DEVIL MANOR

A Complete Novelette

By E. B. JORDAN

"Where is it?"
"Under the stone."
"Where is the key?"
"She has it."
"Where is she?"
"In the gray house in the village."
"What must you say to her?"
"'I am a Norseman.'"

"WHAT does it mean?" asked the lawyer.

"That," said Eric, "is just what I was going to ask you."

"You don't know?" marveled the lawyer.

"I do not. Every birthday since my sixteenth year I've had to repeat the thing. It was a family secret and nobody would tell me anything about its meaning."

The lawyer looked deeply interested.

"My instructions," he said, "were to have an interview with you here in New York on your thirtieth birthday and acquaint you with these facts: a large property was left in trust for his oldest grandson by Colonel Thorvald Ericsson, your grandfather; you cannot receive this property until you have placed in my hands a certain object."

"What object?"

"I'm forbidden to tell you."

"Where is it?"

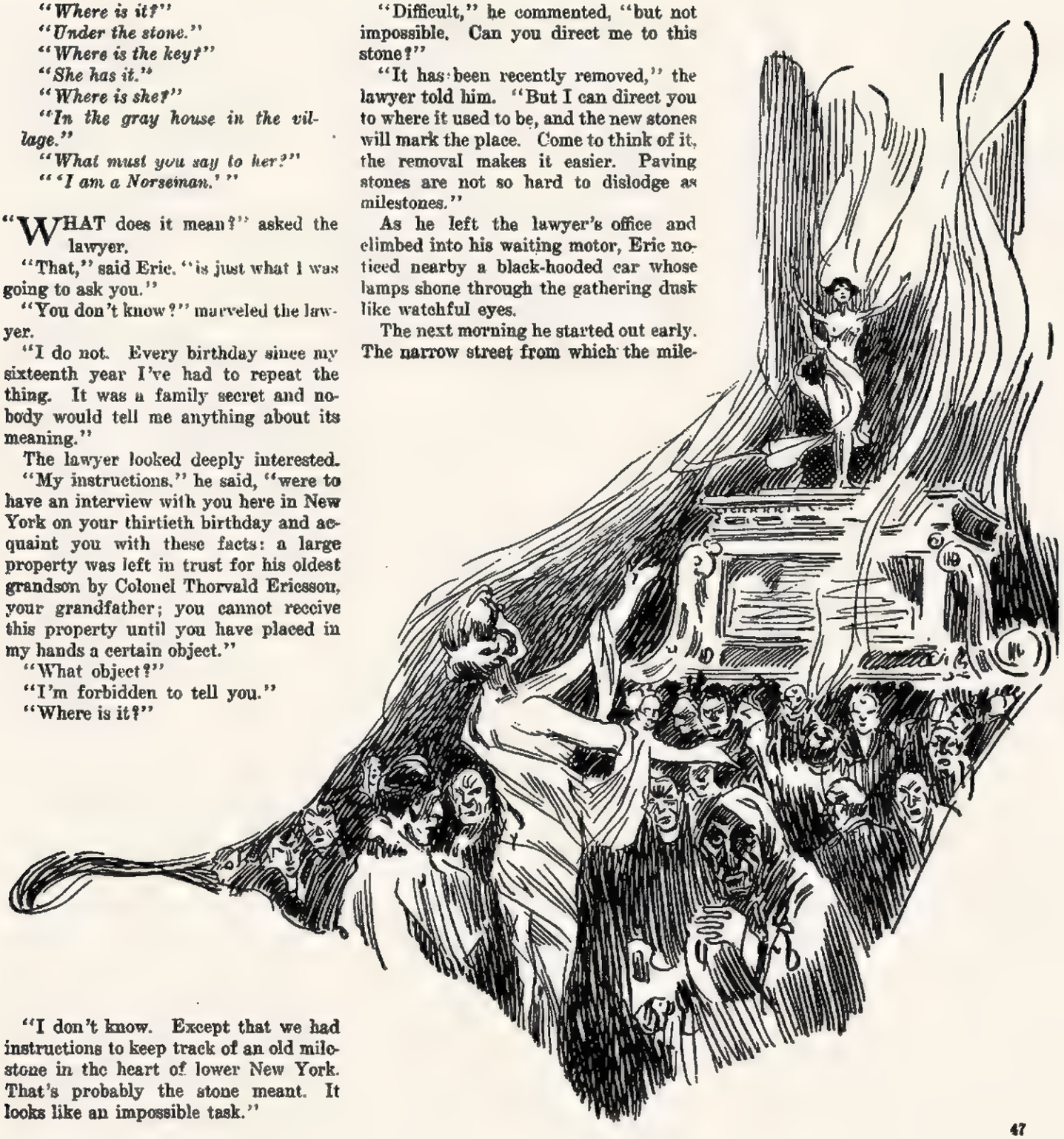
"I don't know. Except that we had instructions to keep track of an old milestone in the heart of lower New York. That's probably the stone meant. It looks like an impossible task."

"Difficult," he commented, "but not impossible. Can you direct me to this stone?"

"It has been recently removed," the lawyer told him. "But I can direct you to where it used to be, and the new stones will mark the place. Come to think of it, the removal makes it easier. Paving stones are not so hard to dislodge as milestones."

As he left the lawyer's office and climbed into his waiting motor, Eric noticed nearby a black-hooded car whose lamps shone through the gathering dusk like watchful eyes.

The next morning he started out early. The narrow street from which the mile-



stone had been removed lay between two rows of giant warehouses, whose main entrances fronted on larger thoroughfares. Even at ten o'clock in the day there was only a watchman and a few loungers to observe Eric as he stopped his car at the curb, and began to walk slowly up and down the middle of the street, pausing occasionally to bend down and examine certain stones.

Overcome with curiosity, the bystanders held a consultation and delegated the watchman to get some explanation of this eccentric behavior.

He approached rather uncertainly, for Eric was a big, determined-looking individual with an air of knowing thoroughly what he was about.

"Mornin', Boss!" The watchman's tone was genial. "What's the trouble?"

Eric glanced at him in an absent-minded way.

"There isn't any trouble—yet," he observed briefly.

The man moved back a step. "Thought maybe yuh'd lost something," he ventured.

"Did you?" asked Eric. For the first time he seemed to perceive the interested group. His brows drew together. Then he tried to whisper in the watchman's ear, which unaccountably receded from him.

"Listen," said Eric, stepping forward. "I'll tell you who I am."

Curiosity overcame caution. The watchman listened.

"I am a Norseman!" whispered Eric.

"Is that all?" asked the disappointed watchman.

Eric frowned again. "Did you want anything more?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied the watchman promptly.

Repeating this conversation to his incredulous companions, the watchman was accused of concealing facts. During the ensuing altercation Eric found the new stones, marked them, and went his way. This time he failed to notice the black car following him.

That night when Eric's car slid silently into the little street, the only person in sight was the policeman on the beat. Eric went straight to him.

"Officer, I want you to help me out," he said.

"What can I do for you?" asked the officer, returning Eric's friendly smile.

"I am an entomologist," confided Eric. "You know what that is, of course?"

"Sure," said the officer, who had a vague idea that it was some kind of Eastern religion.

"I happened to hear last night that an old milestone was removed from this street some weeks ago," continued Eric, "and that the soil beneath the stone is full of a kind of insect called *Ectobia Germanica*, which is of inestimable value to collectors, as you know."

"Sure," agreed the officer.

"I want to dig up some paving stones and get a few of these specimens."

"You'll have to have a permit."

"Haven't time. Leave for South America tomorrow. I will replace the stones exactly as they are."

"Sorry, but I couldn't allow it."

Eric's hand slipped into his pocket.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind keeping this for me?" he asked, holding up something that was green and that crackled. The officer looked at it shrewdly.

"I am afraid I'd lose it," he demurred, "it's so small."

Eric increased its size.

"Perhaps you'd better see what's going on at the corner," he suggested. "That dance-hall will bear watching."

"Thanks; I guess I will do that. Of course you won't try to dig them stones up while my back is turned?"

"Certainly not!"

So the officer turned his back and Eric dug up the stones. They came out easily and for a while he had no trouble in removing the soil beneath. But when the hole was about two feet deep, the earth became almost unyielding and he realized that he had now reached the foundation on which the milestone had rested.

For an hour he worked steadily. Occasionally a burst of noise came from the corner dance-hall; occasionally the policeman cast a side glance at what he firmly believed to be a harmless lunatic; once a long black motor flashed by the end of the little street; but there was nothing to disturb Eric as he worked.

After a while he almost forgot that he was digging for anything in particular and was startled when a flat tin box was brought to light. He put it in his pocket and methodically refilled the hole and replaced the paving stones.

Then he took leave of the policeman, and started home. It was characteristic of him that he drove no faster on account of the mysterious box. He could always wait for what he wanted, though he seldom considered it necessary.

Examining the box in his own room, he found that the metal held firm in spite of the rust of years. He managed to pry open the lid and disclosed a flat silver box, elaborately carved and firmly locked.

"The key?" he wondered. "Ah, she has it, the girl in the village."

The gray house in Greenwich Village looked very dignified and exclusive in the bright sunshine. Even Eric felt he should have been introduced to the old brass knocker before presuming to use it.

"Who would you like to see, sir?" asked the maid who opened the door.

At a loss for a moment, Eric gazed thoughtfully at her. Then he took a chance.

"Your young mistress," he told her easily.

"Come in, sir."

"So there *is* a young mistress," he congratulated himself as he followed the maid into a shadowy hall, through a curtained doorway, and, it seemed, into another century. There in the room was the spinning wheel, the hautboy, the spinnet, the round work table, all the traditional Colonial setting.

Then he heard quick footsteps. A moment more, and the doorway framed in a quaintly charming picture the very spirit of the room. The flowered muslin, the buckled shoes, the high-coiled hair above the little pointed face and long-lashed wondering eyes, were all so redolent of a vanished past that Eric bent his blond head in a bow as ceremonious as the courtesy she swept.

"I am a Norseman," he announced briefly, and awaited results.

They were instantaneous. Her face went white and her hand flew to her throat and drew out a chain and a little silver key.

"Where is the lock?" she asked breathlessly.

Eric produced the silver box. She gave a little cry and held out her hands for it, but Eric returned the box to his pocket and calmly took the hands.

"First," he said, "I want a little information. Who are you, and what is it all about?"

"I am Senta," she informed me. "But I only know that I've lived in this house all my life with Mother, and when I was sixteen I was given this little key and every year had to repeat this:

" 'Where is the lock?
He has it.
Where is he?
He will come.
What will he say?
"I am a Norseman." ' "

"Why, that just fits mine!" exclaimed Eric, and repeated his. "But go on."

"Well, that's all. I'm twenty-six now and I thought you would never come. Tell me about yourself."

When he had told her she took him to her Mother, whose interest was as breathless as Senta's when Eric turned the key in the lock of the silver box.

Then all three stared in amazement. There was in the box only a little slip of yellowed paper.

"Oh, is it all a silly joke?" cried Senta, on the verge of tears.

Eric unfolded the paper and read in a bold but faded handwriting these words:

"It lies in the heart of the Manor. No irreverent eyes may find it. Pray for me!"

"The Manor?" mused Eric. "That must be the old Ericsson Manor in Rock County. But no one has lived there for twenty-five years; not since my grandfather died."

"Maybe it's haunted!" gasped Senta.

"I believe there was a story to that effect. I remember as a child I once heard a countryman call it 'Devil's Manor.' Shall we let the ghost have the treasure?"

"No," replied Senta. "Let's go right now."

"I should say not," declared Eric. "Do you think I am going to let you go off with me like this when you've only known me an hour?"

Senta and her invalid mother both looked at him in innocent wonder.

"But you're the Norseman," protested Senta.

"That makes no difference. You don't know anything about me. We won't go until you've met some people who can at least vouch for my respectability. I have traveled around so much I haven't any very close friends here, but I guess I can find somebody. It isn't as if your mother were well enough to go with us."

For the next three weeks the rebellious Senta was forced to receive visits from various eminenty respectable business men who had been friends of Eric's father and had kept track of the son's adventurous career.

"You're so careful about your references," complained Senta one day, "anybody would think you were applying for a position."

"So I am," replied Eric, with a gleam in his cold eyes. "May I consider myself—engaged?"

"No," said Senta, snippily. "You don't know your place."

"Just for that," retorted Eric, "we will go to Ericsson Manor this Friday instead of next Monday, as we planned."

Nor could all Senta's superstitious warnings change his decision.

A tenderly reminiscent smile was still on his lips as he climbed the many stairs to his old-fashioned apartment. The rooms were dark and still, but as the door closed behind him, he stopped suddenly, warned by that queer presentiment of danger common to men who have lived and fought all over the world.

Almost before the feeling became a thought he whirled and grappled with the man who sprang at him from the darkness.

Back and forth they swayed and strained. Eric's arms closed like steel bars around the other's waist, crushing the breath from him. His ribs almost cracking, the man twisted suddenly and sank his fingers into Eric's throat. Eric's eyes bulged. He relaxed his grip and tore the clutching fingers from his throat. The intruder sprang away, his hand flashed out. Eric felt a sharp pain in his arm and the warm trickle of blood.

He lunged, twisted the knife away, and kicked it across the room. His assailant kept an arm's length away. They were using their fists now, and the unknown was snarling in a beastlike way. Eric broke through his guard and again seized his enemy in that terrible grip. He pinned the man's left arm to his side and forced it down and back.

They writhed and struggled, but slowly Eric's great strength forced the arm back and back until he listened for the bones to crack. In a final effort, he moved forward, his foot slipped in a little pool of blood on the polished floor. Before he could recover his balance his enemy broke from him.

There was a dreadful crash and Eric went down into utter darkness.

WHEN he recovered consciousness there was not a sound in the room. He lay still a moment, trying to recall the late happenings and listening for some sound to betray an alien presence. At last he dragged himself to his feet and stood a moment swaying dizzily.

He felt his way to his desk and lit the lamp. His head still rang from the blow that had stunned him, and his arm was stiff and sore from the knife cut. This proved to be only slight, however, and his head was rapidly clearing. He rather wondered why his assailant had left him alive, for the man had betrayed a bitter hatred.

It was therefore no surprise to discover that not a single valuable was missing, though the rooms had evidently been systematically searched. His desk in particular had been turned inside out and his papers and letters scattered over the floor. He went through them methodically, but was puzzled by the discovery that the only letter missing was a note from Senta, written two days before and appointing Monday as the day for the expedition to the Manor.

There was a faint rattling sound near the window that opened on the fire-escape. The wind was blowing the curtains and some metal object caught in their folds was dragged to and fro. Eric disentangled what proved to be a flat medal or charm. He turned it over in the light, and a Devil's Head leered at him from the polished copper surface.

His hands clenched spasmodically and his mind went back to a never-forgotten incident of his childhood. The mysterious Ericsson Estate had always fascinated him, the more so that his elders would never talk about it. The child had spent long mornings in the road, peering through the bars of the high iron gate, half-hoping, half-fearing, that he might see some ghostly visitant in the deserted grounds, something to justify that whispered name "Devil's Manor."

And one morning he had found a little metal charm like the one he now held. He had carried it to his father, who flung it into the fire as if it were a poisonous thing.

"Forget you have ever seen it," was the only answer to the child's eager questions. "And never go near that place again."

Eric had been sent away to school soon after this, but the memory had come back to him many times during his adventurous life.

On Friday he and Senta made an early start, and by nine o'clock had reached the entrance to the old Ericsson Estate, which lay far off the main roads. The rust-covered iron gates screeched desolately as Eric forced them open. What had once been a broad carriage-way was now so choked with débris that the car had to be left just inside the gates.

They stumbled silently along. Tall, dark trees interlocked their branches above the road, increasing its gloom. They were almost at the house before they saw it.

A large house was Ericsson Manor, with a high tower in the middle and a wing on each side, all of massive stone. The blinds had long since fallen from the deep-set windows, which stared like empty eye-sockets. Here was no warm and ivy-mellowed old age: instead, the stone was covered with splotches of sickly lichen, as if the old house were slowly dying of the loathsome diseases bred of an evil life. Rust and ruin were everywhere, and the silence of utter desolation.

Senta's cold little hand trembled in Eric's warm clasp.

"Let's go away," she begged. "There's something evil about this place."

"Little coward!" teased Eric. "Come along."

As they made their way forward, long, drooping branches caught at them like cold fingers trying to hold them back.

With great difficulty, Eric pushed open the heavy door in the left wing and they entered a square hall. The dust of a quarter-century lay thick everywhere, except where the storms of many years had beaten in at the ruined windows.

They entered the library just off the hall and the chill gloom crept to meet them like a ghostly presence. Their breathing sounded loud in the absolute stillness.

Suddenly they heard a sound. Far off and faint at first, it swelled into a solemn chant that seemed to come from the floor under their feet. Then it died, and the deathlike silence closed round them again.

"It was the wind," said Eric reassuringly.

"It was not the wind," said Senta, pale with superstitious fear. "It was voices—many voices, all together. Let's go away."

But the adventure-love was roused in Eric.

"Let's see if we can get into the Round Tower from the hall," he suggested.

Senta refused to explore.

"Then you wait for me here," he proposed. "There is no other door or exit from this room, and I'll be right in the hall."

"Will you promise not to go out of sight of this door?" she asked.

"Need a man promise to guard his dearest treasure?" he asked.

In the security of home, Senta would have vigorously resented his proprietary attitude, but now she had no retort ready.

There were many rooms opening off the hall, and Eric opened door after door, to find, in varying degrees, the same ruin and neglect. He did not cross the thresholds, for he did not want to lose sight of the room in which he had left Senta. But clearly none of these rooms connected with the Round Tower.

"We'll have to get to the Round Tower from outside," he stated, re-entering the library. "Come—" he stopped short.

There was the big chair in which he had left Senta: there was her little handkerchief, lying beneath an old portrait: but Senta herself was not in the room!

Not for an instant had he lost sight of the only exit to the room. But Senta had vanished.

And once more beneath his feet the strange chant swelled up and died away.

CHAPTER TWO

ERIC pulled himself together. There was no reason for alarm: Senta had found some secret door; old houses were full of such things.

He stooped to pick up her handkerchief and struck his head against the frame of the portrait. He pulled at it sharply and it swung outward, revealing a large dark opening in the wall behind. He stepped through into a narrow hall whose walls were hung with some heavy sombre material. The floor, too, was padded and his steps made no sound.

As he walked away from the lighted entrance he found himself in total darkness except for the occasional flare of his pocket flashlight, and as the passage twisted he had a queer feeling that somebody or something had just rounded the turn ahead of him. He was almost beginning to think that Senta was playing a joke on him when the floor sank beneath his feet and he was carried downward as if in an elevator.

It stopped with a jerk: a light glared suddenly in his face, and he saw in front of him two tall figures covered with shapeless black robes, their heads and faces hidden in black head-dresses, half cowl, half mask. He could see the gleam of their eyes through tiny slits in the masks, and grew restive under the silent scrutiny.

"What's the idea?" he inquired impatiently. "What are you, anyway? A blooming moving-picture outfit?"

His voice rang through the heavy silence as incongruously as a laugh in a tomb. The strange pair made no reply, but each laid a hand on his arm and pushed him forward.

Possessed with the feeling that it was all a silly masquerade, Eric roughly shook them off. Instantly a hard and extremely convincing automatic was poked into his ribs, while a cloth drawn closely around his jaws effectually gagged any vocal protest. Eric had been in tight places before, and therefore wasted no time in futile resistance.

The prodding revolver intimated that he was to walk forward, and he walked forward—through a massive door, down another long dark passage and into a small square room. In the middle of the floor was a trap door, and through its open lid there streamed a glare shot with films of smoke. There was a sound of footsteps, a deep human groan and two black-cowled heads rose suddenly above the trap, coming gradually into view as if ascending steps.

Two more followed, and they finally stepped into the room carrying between them a limp figure from whose lips burst another agonized groan. The bearers threw him roughly on a bench and Eric saw that his clothes were scorched and ragged, his drawn face black with smoke, and his feet terribly burned. One of Eric's captors spoke in a sibilant whisper.

"Did he give the information? And did he recant?"

"Of course."

"How long did he stand it?"

"Half an hour."

"What is to be done with him now?"

"He is to be exhibited to the Worshipers and when they have finished with him he will be dead. He is almost dead now."

Eric's guard shrugged. "He has done the like to others. Now it is his turn. This one," he prodded Eric with the automatic, "is to endure it for an hour."

The others turned and looked at Eric.

"An hour! Will he live that long?"

"He looks strong," replied the other indifferently. "Sebastian hates him."

"Oh! If Sebastian hates him he will not have an easy death."

"None of us will if Sebastian finds us chattering here," snarled Eric's other guard.

His companions glanced uneasily over their shoulders. Eric had just resolved to risk a struggle when a deep gong sounded over their heads, and at the signal the six men threw themselves upon him and almost flung him down the steps into the room below. The trap was closed, and with a rattle of chains the stairway was drawn up like a drawbridge till it hung against the ceiling under the door at least five feet above Eric's head.

He looked around him. It was a small room, its ceiling, walls and floor of sheet iron. And the iron was warm. There was nothing in the room except a heavy suffocating odor, but, remembering the tortured man, Eric had little doubt as to the fate in store for himself.

He listened to the receding footsteps in the room above. They died away, but presently other footsteps came, and he heard a clicking in one corner of the ceiling; he saw a tiny opening, and through it an eye stared at him; the aperture clicked shut; there was a confused murmur. Then these footsteps receded, too.

If they had not locked the trap door there was just one chance for escape. He measured with his eyes the distance between himself and the drawn-up staircase; fortunately he was a trained athlete and the room was long enough to allow a running jump. Already the air was stifling, and smoke was beginning to curl from under his shoes. (The tor-

tured man's shoes had been burned away, he remembered.) The wall was scorching hot when Eric backed against it.

"Now for the Douglas Fairbanks stuff," he remarked with a grim smile.

The next moment he was hanging by his hands from the stairway. He crawled over it, and crouching under the trapdoor, thrust his powerful shoulders suddenly against it. The abruptness of the movement saved him. The trap door flew open, sending the guard, who had been sitting on it, sprawling to the floor. It did not take Eric long to secure the automatic, with the barrel of which he quite coolly knocked the man insensible. He then stripped off the robe and hood, and put them on himself, bound and gagged the senseless man and rolled him under the bench. He closed the trapdoor, and automatic in hand, cautiously opened the heavy outside door. Instantly a wave of sound rushed to his ears and he realized that with the door closed the little room had been soundproof.

Somewhere ahead of him there was a pandemonium of yelling voices, frenzied laughter, and gusts of wild music. He felt his way along until he stepped through a half-screened doorway on to a high alcove like a stage box, and looked down on an immense hall, lit by low-hung lights a pallid green and sickly blue.

The vast place at first suggested a church with the dim lights flickering on long stained-glass windows; niches where candles burned before shadowy images; a huge organ, and the silent black-robed throng clustered around a high altar at the far end of the hall.

Yet there was a discordant note somewhere—a sense of the abnormal. The lights flared higher and the lurking evil was revealed. The images in the shrines were crouching, goat-horned creatures with leering faces; the stained-glass windows depicted scenes and figures of incredible depravity and horror. And there was a low moaning in the center of the black-robed group.

A tall figure rose suddenly above it and stood beside the altar.

"Back to your places!" commanded this one. "Let the renegade recant before he dies."

There was a rebellious murmur from the crowd as it pressed closer around its victim. The man beside the altar broke into furious cursing. He snatched up a thick whip and unmercifully lashed the heads and shoulders just beneath him. With screams of pain, they scattered, sinking to their knees in a semi-circle half a yard from the altar.

The man with the whip looked down at a moaning something that sprawled at his feet. It lifted a ghastly drawn face and Eric saw that it was the tortured man.

"Mercy—Sebastian—" gasped the victim.

Sebastian seized the half-dead creature by the throat, dragging him to his knees.

"It is hard to believe," he said mockingly, "that a few days ago this whimpering broken thing in my hand was Schuyler Van Tassell!"

Eric suppressed a gasp. A week ago at his club he had seen Schuyler Van Tassell, looking bored and dissipated as usual, but as usual coventional and sleek.

"Before you die," Sebastian went on, "you shall renew your vows of allegiance to our great Master, Ruler of the Dark Invisible Empire, Prince of Fiends, Our Sovereign Lord, Satan. Repeat the Creed."

Cringing and moaning, the thing that had been Schuyler Van Tassell began:

"I BELIEVE—IN OUR LORD —THE DEVIL—RULER—OF— E A R T H—A N D H E L L— WHOSE—"

The blasphemous words died in his throat.

"Oh, God!" he sobbed. His head fell back and Sebastian dropped a dead body across the dark altar.

The kneeling people swayed in sudden relief from tension.

"The fate of all renegades," said Sebastian, who made an obeisance before the altar and stood looking upward into the shadows.

Following his gaze, Eric's heart almost stood still. For he found himself looking into an enormous dark face. Such diabolic malice glared from the glittering eyes and wide sardonic smile that it hardly needed the little pointed horns to proclaim it an effigy of the Devil himself. This same face in miniature Eric had seen on the copper coins. He noted the shadowy sweep of vast wings, the hovering trend of the gigantic figure looming menacingly above its worshipers.

Sebastian stooped over the altar and seven jets of green flame sprang up around it. Higher and higher they leaped, licking out toward the still figure lying there. A heavy smell of incense rose on the air. Swaying back and forth, Sebastian began to intone. His voice sing-songed through some kind of long ritual, evidently well-known, for he paused at certain intervals for responses from the worshipers.

The words were gabbled so quickly that Eric could not distinguish their meaning. But the monotonous deep voice, the regular chorus of responses, began to have a strangely soothing effect on his excited mind. He felt himself swaying slowly, as the worshipers were swaying.

The intoning died away and from somewhere there came a distant chanting. Little colored lights flashed out from the walls, the ceiling, the altar; twinkling and sparkling and confusing the mind with their restless brilliance. The rich deep chant swelled higher as the singers approached, and the big organ added its rolling harmony to the voices.

A lurid glare flared suddenly behind the Devil statue, outlining the monstrous form with hideous distinctness. From somewhere back of it two lines of scarlet-robed figures marched into the hall. Their faces were hidden in scarlet cowls and each one carried a tall candle which cast a deep red light.

The lines moved slowly around the altar, turning and twisting, winding and interwinding. The little colored lights were twinkling; the red lights and red robes were twining and turning: the organ and voices were rising and falling: the kneeling throng were bending and swaying, in the warm, heavy, incense-laden air.

Eric was bending and swaying, too, struggling feebly against the lethargic spell.

Like the crack of a gun, the quick beat of a drum crashed through the music. The lights went out: the music stopped. There was not a sound in the hot, perfumed blackness.

Then, like the *tick, tick, tick* of an eight-day clock the drumbeats came. In Eric's brain the short, dull thuds tapped raw nerves. He held his ears: the sound beat through. He tried to count:

"One-two-three—one-two-three—one-two-three."

What came next he did not know. He could not think. It was not a drum. It was a bell—a thousand bells—all the dismal bells of all the world. Wild alarm-bells, dreary prison bells, sinister temple gongs, funeral death-bells—clanging and tolling till the vast hall reverberated with discordant sound.

Silence again, an almost unbearable hush. For the first time in his life, Eric felt a wave of fear sweep over him, emanating from the kneeling people. *What* did they fear? A wan light began to glimmer down there, flickering over the thrownback heads and gleaming eyes. Eric glanced sharply up and the wave of fear swept over him again. The

colossal Devil figure was strangely luminous.

Down in the blackness the chant rose softly. The words were of an appalling and deliberate blasphemy, but the rhythmic cadence was sweet in the hot perfumed darkness—and surely the huge luminous figure was moving?

Yes, it swayed, and the head was bending down. He was looking at his Worshipers. Now the glittering eyes looked into Eric's and Eric sank to his knees. The eyes moved past him but still he knelt there, his brain on fire. The wild dark strain in the Ericsson blood was uppermost in him at last.

The air was vibrant with malignant, unseen presences; there was a sense of hurrying, a rustling and murmuring as if a crowd were pressing across some barrier. He knew at once when the barrier went down. Mad laughing things fled past him in the blackness: soft cold fingers brushed his cheek.

He felt a spiritual pollution as the evil-charged atmosphere surged about him. Swarms of dark clouds swirled around the luminous Devil figure, whirling away into semi-transparent shapes that gathered solidity as they rushed down to the black human mass that opened to receive them.

The hush was shattered by an outburst of howls, screeches, and crazy laughter. The red lights glimmered on a yelling, leaping crowd of men and women. Led by the organ, they broke into frenzied song, and began a violent dance, which yet had some semblance of order, as each one in turn genuflected before the Devil figure.

They had torn off their hoods now, and the tossing, upturned faces were a dreadful sight, every countenance marked with vicious degeneracy or habitual depravity. The dance grew faster and more furious. Here and there wild figures flung themselves out of it to kneel before the shrined goat-gods and shout vile prayers.

Only Sebastian stood aloof, his back to the seething mob, his uncovered face raised toward his Master. Below his gleaming blond hair his face showed, hideously disfigured by deep scars, but its cold passivity had no trace of the hell-fire inflaming the mad dancers. Eric felt a strange sense of kinship with the still figure. This man's devil-worship, he divined, was a sin of the intellect, a highway to occult powers. To this subtle temptation Eric's reckless ambition responded eagerly.

The Sardonic Devil-face seemed to soften, to invite, to promise strange revelations and secret knowledge. Its lurking evil no longer repelled, but presented only the necessary challenge to an adventurous spirit. Right and wrong were arbitrary terms, the stumbling block of weaklings, who dared not pass the bounds of normal human experience.

Like an insidious poison the imperious dream thrilled through him; he saw himself wielding strange powers over the forces of evil, mastering the ancient secret lore that had lain hidden through countless centuries. Only a few had braved its perils, but of those few it had made gods—his hand clenched abruptly and closed on something soft in his pocket.

Mechanically he lifted it to his face, peering at it in the dim light. Instantly he was aware of the fresh, clean fragrance of lavender. It was Senta's handkerchief. *Senta!* Like a bracing wind the thought of her swept the unwholesome mists from his half-hypnotized mind. From the time of their first meeting she had never been absent from his thoughts—never until the devil-music had cast its spell upon him.

Almost sick with spiritual revulsion, he leaned against the wall, the little handkerchief pressed against his cheek. Where was she? In what corner of this abode of devils was she hidden, frightened, perhaps tortured?

He groaned in impotent fury and stifled a wild impulse to leap down upon Sebastian and force him to give her back. But if they killed him there would be no help for her.

He became conscious that the uproar had died down and a single voice was speaking. It came from a man who stood at the foot of the altar, facing Sebastian in an attitude of defiance.

"I tell you the hour has struck," this one declared solemnly. "What better time to settle it than this—when our Infernal Master has turned his face to us—when our dark brothers from the spirit-world have crossed the gulf and mingled with us? Not one of our band is missing tonight, including that" (he glanced at the body sprawled across the altar) "therefore the traitor is among us. Find him, you whose power is only second to the Arch-Fiend himself!"

Sebastian answered in the mocking voice which seemed habitual with him:

"How do you know there is a traitor, Julius? And what if there is?"

"What if there is?" exclaimed the other. "You can ask that? Have you forgotten that during the last two months enormous blackmail has been levied upon various ones of our 'respectable' members? Have you forgotten that Steiner and Howard went to the electric chair only because the police had secret information of their hiding-place, information that was sold to them in a roundabout way? Yet you ask me what of it!"

"Steiner and Howard were small loss," commented Sebastian. A growl of protest went up from the hall.

"They rebelled against you," said Julius, "but you subdued that, and they were the only ones who could bring us girls for the sacrifice."

"Yes, yes," cried several voices. "We have had no sacrifice for months. Where are the victims, Sebastian?"

Ignoring the clamor, Sebastian kept his gaze fixed on Julius, who stepped back a little as if he found the steady stare alarming.

"Schuyler Van Tassell knew of these betrayals—I think that frightened him into 'reforming'," went on Julius. "And he and I managed to get so close on the trail that we saw the traitor."

Sebastian bent forward.

"I knew Van Tassell had been close to him. But you saw him, too?"

Julius moved back another step.

"We trailed him together," he said, somewhat uneasily. "It was just a glimpse—a big, fair, handsome man. I would recognize him if I could see him in a good light."

Sebastian laughed.

"And you think I will break that most essential rule that no member shall uncover his face in a good light except to me? You think I will declare a man a traitor on your unsupported word?"

His head thrust forward like a snake about to strike as he continued silkily:

"You, who say you have seen the traitor and let him escape—you, who have acknowledged yourself the intimate of the renegade Van Tassell—you, who wish to violate our protective secrecy—*where were you when we were betrayed?*"

Julius recoiled before the venomous question.

"I'm no traitor!" he protested in terror. "I can prove it—with witnesses—give me time—as God is my witness—"

Sebastian laughed triumphantly.

"He calls on God!" he jeered. "He, an acolyte of our Lord Satan! Another renegade!"

"No, no—" stammered the terrified man, "it was just a habit of speech—"

"Habits can be broken," replied Sebastian, with a meaning glance at the dead man.

Julius fell on his knees.

"I swear I am no renegade!" he screamed. "I believe—" he began to stumble through the infamous creed.

"Silence!" commanded Sebastian.

Turning scornfully away from the cowed man, he almost hurled his words at the muttering crowd:

"And silence, too, you scum of Gehenna! Must you learn again that I am your master, High-Priest of our supreme Lord, who has withdrawn in anger at your profane murmurs?" (Indeed there was only a vague, monstrous shadow in the blackness where the Devil figure had glimmered.)

Sebastian's voice rose higher and higher; his manner grew more and more frenzied:

"Though I know that every one of you, human or spectres from beyond the grave, is stained with every ghastly vice and crime, you cannot frighten me! I alone dare show my face to all!"

He caught up a torch and threw its light upon his wild, scarred face.

"Look at me!" His eyes blazed with fanatic excitement; his form seemed to vibrate to some strange gust of passion. "In me," his voice dropped to a low and solemn tone, "there lives the reincarnate soul of that dread Master-Fiend, Gilles de Retz, the great medieval founder of our faith!"

A long sigh swept over the spell-bound listeners. They sank slowly to their knees. Sebastian leaned forward. His eyes glittered insanely in the red light, he spoke almost in a whisper.

"I have plunged into the blackest gulf of Hell and sat among the souls forever damned."

The kneeling people fell on their faces before him. The sight seemed to infuriate him.

"Yes, lick the dust," he shrieked, "for I hold your worthless lives in my hand! I can send your souls hurtling across the gulf to join the demons waiting for you there!" He spoke with such absolute conviction that Eric felt a chill. A low moan went up from the prostrate people.

Sebastian seemed to go quite mad.

"I will, I will!" he screamed, "I will blot you from the earth; Now!"

He threw out his hand toward the altar, groping furiously for something. Suddenly a tall, masked woman stepped from behind the Devil-statue and laid a hand on Sebastian's arm. He whirled with upraised whip; but, at sight of her, the whip fell to the floor. The madness died out of his eyes and his face was illumined by a smile of exquisite tenderness. He lifted her hand to his lips with a reverent love that seemed to lift him to a purer plane.

They stood a moment, looking into each other's eyes. Then he put her gently to one side and faced the throng with all his former coldness and mockery.

"As for the traitor, I have him and will produce him in my own good time. But you asked for a victim. Behold!" And stepping to one side of the altar he jerked aside a curtain.

A clear light shone down upon a narrow doorway, and in the focus of the light stood Senta.

She was dressed in a straight white robe and her long dark hair hung over her shoulders on each side of her little white face. Her hands were clasped rigidly on her breast, but her dark eyes were wide with horror as she tried to see what lay before her in the half-lit room. Eric, his hands clenched on the balcony rail, knew by the shrinking of her little figure, the dilating of her lustrous eyes, the exact moment when she saw the mass of frightful faces staring at her.

They gazed in silence a moment, then broke into a chorus of snarls, shouts and laughter, instantly stilled by the voice of Julius:

"Remember the Law, Sebastian! She must be willing!"

"And do you presume to teach me the Law?" Sebastian asked with a scornful smile. He turned to Senta and said icily:

"You, who are to be honored in the service of our Master; it is the Law that innocent blood must be sacrificed from time to time, that the strength of our dark powers may be renewed. But it is also the Law that no victim shall be forced to the altar either by threats of torture or of shame. Answer truly by the God you worship; have you been personally threatened or ill-treated?"

Senta's voice trembled a little, but her manner showed that she was fully mistress of herself.

"I have not been ill-treated or threatened," she answered clearly. "I offer myself as a willing sacrifice."

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN Eric lert her alone in the library, Senta sat very still, glancing nervously around. Startled by a slight sound, she was amazed to see a portrait swing out from the wall. A tall figure stood in the shadowy opening, its blond head half-turned away.

Thinking that Eric had discovered the door to the Round Tower, she obeyed the beckoning finger and stepped into the passage. Her hand was seized in a strong grasp and she was hurried along so quickly that she could not be sure that her breathless questions were heard.

Her guide swerved abruptly around a corner and led her down a number of steps. Indignant at Eric's ignoring her questions, Senta balked on the last step, but the man simply picked her up and carried her into a room near by. He dropped her unceremoniously upon a chair, said briefly:

"Keep her here, dearest, till I come back," and was gone.

Senta jumped up angrily and saw a tall woman coming to her from the back of the lamp-lit room. The woman's every movement was of exquisite grace, but her face was so ugly as to be almost grotesque. There was something about the odd, clever countenance that stirred Senta's memory.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, before the woman could speak. "You are—you are Judith Dangerfield, the great violinist who disappeared three years ago!"

The woman turned white.

"How do you know? I—I have never seen you," she stammered in a voice that had the low sweet resonance of a 'cello.

"I went to your last concert," explained Senta, "and I've kept your picture pinned to my wall. Where have you been all this time?"

Judith Dangerfield raised her head proudly.

"I have been here," she replied, "with my husband." Evidently shaken by the unexpected recognition, she seemed to feel the need of justifying herself. "I had to disappear from the world because my husband is Sebastian, the High Priest of the Devil Worshippers."

"What in the world are they?" Senta asked wonderingly.

"A very secret and powerful association composed of the most vicious intelligences of every class," Judith said briefly. "My husband is its head, as were his father and grandfather before him."

"But surely *you* don't belong to it?" Senta asked incredulously.

"Yes!" said Judith.

Then, as she saw the shocked surprise in Senta's face:

"Oh, I don't believe in it!" she exclaimed, scornfully. "I don't believe in anything—except our love. But whatever my husband does, good or bad, I do likewise. Then if there should happen to be another life or eternal punishment, we will face it together." Her voice vibrated with feeling and she threw out her arms with a passionate gesture. "If I were good, it would separate us—and how could I be happy in Heaven unless he were with me there?"

Senta looked at her sorrowfully, but said nothing. With a quick shrug Judith changed the subject.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. "Since you didn't come for the sacrifice?"

"Oh—" Senta came back to herself with a start. "Why—where is Eric? Why did he leave me here?"

"Eric? Did Eric Ericsson bring you here?"

"Yes. Do you know him? Oh!" Senta remembered suddenly. "He called you 'dearest'!"

"Nonsense, child!" said Judith impatiently. "That was Sebastian who brought you to this room. Yes, I know he looked like Eric, but you didn't see his face, did you? Well, then! Is Eric your lover?"

"I—I think so," Senta stammered, blushing. Then, as Judith smiled rather contemptuously, she added firmly: "Yes, he is. And I love him, too."

Judith looked at her in a troubled way. "I'm very sorry," she said.

"Why?" asked Senta. "Is he in any danger? Oh, what is it all about?"

Before Judith could answer a firm, quick footstep sounded outside and Sebastian entered. In height and coloring and general bearing he was surprisingly like Eric. But the likeness ended at his face, which was twisted and seamed with a number of deep scars.

"I have him!" he told Judith exultantly, adding, as she make a quick silencing gesture: "Oh, the girl has to know about it."

He turned to Senta and said coolly:

"You are to be a sacrifice to the Devil, but first you must go before the Worshipers and say you are willing."

Realizing from Judith's expression, that this was no idle threat, Senta tried to meet it bravely.

"You can kill me," she said in a shaky little voice, "but you can't make me say I'm willing."

Sebastian smiled dangerously. "You think not?" he asked.

Judith laid her hand on his arm.

"Must you take this child?" she pleaded. "She is so innocent and young."

"She will be the more acceptable," he answered. He caught her hand and drew her to him. "Judith! Do you, too, turn against me?" His voice rose excitedly. "You know how we have worked to get the hidden treasure—you know the people clamor for a victim—yet when I have treasure and victim in my grasp you turn against me!" His manner grew wilder and wilder; his face was deeply flushed; the veins stood out on his forehead. "You, my wife, my only friend, you desert me!"

"No, no!" Judith clung to his arm. "I will not oppose you. Only take her away quickly!" She threw herself into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

Sebastian's unnatural excitement died down. He took Senta's hand and led her from the room. She followed quietly and they went down the passage and into the small stone room.

"Do you wish to see your lover?" asked Sebastian.

The frightened girl nodded. Sebastian moved a small stone in the floor and pulled Senta down beside him. Looking down into the room beneath, she saw Eric, grim and pale, standing just below. He glanced up, but Sebastian pulled her away before she could speak and pushed the stone into place.

"What was he doing there, and why was there smoke in the room and under his feet?" she asked.

Sebastian smiled cruelly.

"There was smoke," he said, speaking slowly to insure her comprehension, "because the iron walls and floor of that room are hot and will go on getting hotter until they are red-hot. And Eric is imprisoned there and shall stay there until he burns to death unless—" He paused to watch her as she leaned against the wall.

"Unless?" she faltered, sick with horror.

"Unless you are willing to become a sacrifice," he replied.

"What have we ever done to you that you should be so cruel!"

"I hate him!" cried Sebastian, his face convulsed with rage. "All our lives he has had what should be mine! And I'll strike at him through you! Quick! Decide! Will you let your lover die by slow torture, or will you give yourself to a quick, easy death to save him?"

Senta sank down to her knees. Until the coming of Eric her life had been a quiet and pleasant dream. His love had aroused her to realities and awakened her womanhood, which now attained its full growth in these moments of agony. All the unselfish devotion of her warm young heart and all the ideals and traditions of her race and training nerved her to meet this supreme demand. She rose to her feet and faced her tormenter.

"I will do it," she said. "But you must let him go free—before I die you must let me see that he is free and unharmed."

He promised solemnly and led her back to Judith, who received them with a hopeful look which vanished when her husband said:

"She has consented. Prepare her for the sacrifice and bring her to the door." He went out.

"Child, child, why did you consent!" cried Judith despairingly.

Senta told her and Judith wrung her hands in impotent anguish.

"If I had only known you were coming I might have saved you," she moaned. "But he only told me about Eric and we didn't expect him until Tuesday, when the Devil Worshipers would have been gone, scattered among their homes. Well, we must get ready. If I can find any way to save you, I will."

She loosened Senta's hair and helped her put on a white robe.

"I have dressed many girls for the sacrifice," said Judith somberly, "but you are the first one I have wished to save. Yes," she answered Senta's horrified glance, "all of them were tainted with this Devil Worship and I was glad they died before they could sink any deeper in the mire. Besides, you have recalled my old life to me—I would kill my husband and myself if I were only sure we would die together. But something might go wrong—one of us might live, without the other—"

Senta forgot her own tragedy in her pity for the unhappy woman.

"Can't you change him?" she asked.

"He promised to disband them and take me away as soon as he got the treasure," replied Judith. "But what peace can we have! What good will the disbanding do. They will find us again. They are all moral lepers who spread evil wherever they go. Hundreds of people are being dragged down into this all the time." She laughed harshly. "Oh, if there were really a God, he would reach down and destroy this dreadful house and everybody in it!"

"Will they—kill me—very soon?" faltered Senta, as Judith completed her task.

"Not till tonight," Judith answered hurriedly. "You are only going to be shown to them now. Come along."

"Where are we?" asked Senta as they went along the passage.

"In the Round Tower," replied Judith. "My room is directly underneath the Tower room called the Heart of the Manor where old Colonel Torvald Ericsson used to have his study. The Tower has no windows at all."

Talking along as if to divert Senta's mind, Judith took her through a narrow hall and stopped before a closed door. Senta could hear a confused murmur of voices on the other side of the door, but could not distinguish any words.

"Listen," Judith seized her arm. "If it is possible to save you without endangering my husband, I will save you. But you must follow my directions. When you see those horrible creatures, don't show any surprise or terror. All the victims are safe until the sacrifice, because they are supposed to be under the protection of Satan. And they are usually stupefied with drugs and half-hypnotized

so that they look the part. The victim really has a kind of power over them which we may be able to use in your favor."

Through the wall came the sound of chanting.

"How beautiful!" cried Senta, as the rhythmic music swung nearer to them.

"Hush! Don't listen to it!" cried Judith in a vehement whisper. "It is the Devil's own music—it will sap your will power. I know, for I wrote it! Yes," she replied to Senta's questioning eyes, "and I believed in the Devil while I was writing it, while he helped me write it!" She shuddered and glanced back over her shoulder with a curious look of dread.

Alternately attracted and repelled by her strange companion, Senta said no more but managed to keep her thoughts away from the haunting music. It stopped at last and there was a long silence; then a burst of noise prolonged into an uproar, terminating finally in what sounded like an argument between two people. Senta saw a worried look on Judith's face.

"I don't understand this," muttered Judith. "I must go to Sebastian. Stay here."

She ran swiftly down the passage and disappeared. Senta tremblingly listened to Sebastian's fury, unintelligible to her. She heard him approach the door where she stood and tried to suppress her terror when he suddenly threw aside the curtain and opened the door. Dazed by the horror of the dreadful creatures leaping and yelling beneath her, it was only by thinking of Eric's danger that she gathered courage to offer herself as a sacrifice.

CHAPTER FOUR

THERE followed an outburst of exultant yells. Eric gazed at the shaking little figure and doubted his senses.

Surely she could not have been perverted to Devil Worship! Why, then, was she willing? But, dismissing this question as temporarily unimportant, he swung himself over the balcony rail, his plan of rescue already clear in his mind.

The black pillars supporting the balcony were fortunately in the shadow, so that his dark figure was practically invisible as he slid down to the floor. Mingling with the seething mob, whose attention was concentrated upon Senta, it was an easy matter to reach the altar, leap across it and throw his arms around the tall masked woman. Holding her powerless with one arm, he pressed his automatic against her head, just as Sebastian sprang at him with a furious snarl.

Eric jumped backward, into the shadows, dragging the woman with him.

"Keep off!" he hissed, "or I'll kill her!"

Sebastian stopped short. For a moment they glared at each other, while the yelling crowd surged toward its prospective victim, utterly unheeding the silent drama in the shadow of the Devil Statue.

Eric spoke in a sharp whisper.

"I'll kill her," he repeated, "if you attack me or make a single move to betray me to those devils. But let me get my girl away and you can have yours."

"You!" exclaimed Sebastian, speaking softly even in his amazement.

The woman was struggling to raise her face which Eric pressed tightly against his shoulder.

"You're hurting her!" protested Sebastian in an agonized whisper.

The sight of Senta's terror had made Eric quite merciless.

"I'll do worse than hurt her," he threatened, " if you don't help me get Senta away. Tell them the victim must be prepared for the sacrifice—but be very careful what you say," he warned, "and don't get too near Senta, either."

Sebastian turned abruptly and his imperious voice compelled the attention of the frenzied creatures.

"You have seen the victim," he told them, "now she must be taken away to be prepared. Go back to your places, and pray our Master to accept the sacrifice."

The Worshipers swarmed back to their places and knelt, with their heads bowed almost to the floor.

Still holding the woman, Eric attained the doorway and pushed Senta through it. She went quietly, but Sebastian caught at the woman in Eric's arm.

"Give Judith to me!" he demanded in a fierce undertone.

"We haven't escaped yet," Eric whispered. He lifted her across the threshold and slammed the narrow door in Sebastian's furious face.

But the door had no lock and Sebastian tore it open and pursued them down the passage. Eric knew that even if Sebastian had a gun he dare not shoot for fear of wounding Judith. He therefore held her fast in one arm. Pushing Senta before him he took the first turning that offered and found himself again at the door of the stone room above the torture-cell. A glance showed him that the guard still lay under the bench.

Eric released Judith and turned to bar the door. But Sebastian had already stepped inside and slammed the door. Eric found himself looking into the muzzle of a pistol.

Before Sebastian had time to say: "Hands up!" Eric dived and, "tackling" in football style, he knocked Sebastian's feet from under him. The gun exploded harmlessly in the air and Sebastian went down. His head crashed against the stone floor and he lay motionless.

With an anguished moan Judith threw herself down by her husband, but Eric pushed her gently aside, lifted the unconscious man and laid him on a bench.

"He is only stunned. It isn't serious," he told her, adding mentally: "More's the pity!"

Judith lifted tragic eyes to Eric's face. "If he dies," she said, "you will have killed your cousin."

"My cousin!" exclaimed Eric. He leaned over and studied the quiet face.

"Sebastian Ericsson," he said thoughtfully. "I heard he was dead years ago. But even without the scars I wouldn't have known him. We were never together at all, except for a week he spent with us just after his father died. We were only boys at the time, but we hated each other even then."

"And his hate has grown with the years," said Judith somberly.

"While I had almost forgotten him," remarked Eric.

"My father tried to befriend him, meant to adopt him, in fact. But he was such a treacherous, sneering, malignant brute that I think we were all glad when he disappeared. He acted as if we had done him a mortal injury."

"You had!" cried Judith with flashing eyes. "Your father had stolen the inheritance. Why should Torvald Ericsson leave his fortune in trust for Sigismund's son, Sigismund, who denounced his father and would have nothing whatever to do with him? Whereas Eldred was high among the Devil Worshipers, and was his father's faithful helper and companion till death."

"And from what I've heard of Uncle Eldred," Eric commented grimly, "Torvald Ericsson's death was probably hastened by his faithful companion. There was no love lost between them."

"Eldred was a good son to him," she maintained, "and yet his son was disinherited." She laid her hand tenderly on Sebastian's head.

"Well, my dear girl, there's no good arguing about it now," remarked Eric smiling. "Anyway, Lord knows I've not a cent in the world that I didn't earn myself!"

"But you will have!" she cried, quickly. "You are thirty!"

"O—ho!" said Eric, "So that's the explanation of all this mixup. Our friend here learned something one of

those times I caught him listening at keyholes, while he lived with us."

"It was his right to know!" she flashed.

"He thought anything he chose to do was his right," Eric replied. "He didn't know the meaning of loyalty—" he stopped, as a startling thought occurred to him.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's the traitor those Devil Worshipers are trying to discover. It would be just like him."

Judith's ghastly face showed that his guess had hit the mark.

"Hush!" she gasped. "They would tear him to pieces if they knew! Julius suspects already, but is afraid to say anything without more proof. I begged Sebastian not to do it, but he wanted to get more money so we two could go away. You won't betray him?"

"Not unless I find it necessary for our own protection," he answered coolly.

The soft *thud* of a gently-closed door broke through their preoccupation. Eric whirled around, his eyes seeking the guard under the bench. The guard was gone. Eric flung open the door and heard someone running swiftly down the passage.

"But he must have heard everything," cried Judith when he told her. "He has gone to tell them. Only Sebastian can control them, and he is unconscious—Oh what can we do!"

She wrung her hands. Then she looked intently at Eric.

"You are very much alike," she said, half under her breath. "I believe we can do it. We will have to risk it. Pick up Sebastian and come with me."

Realizing that for the moment their interests were one, Eric obeyed. Judith led them to her own room, and while Eric placed Sebastian on a couch Judith went into an inner room from which she brought a small square box.

"This is a make-up box," she said, opening it, and taking out a number of little jars and brushes. "We use it in certain ceremonies. Sit down!"

Eric sat down in the chair she indicated. It was placed close beside Sebastian's couch, and at last he began to guess at her purpose.

"You think I can pass for him?" he asked doubtingly.

"Yes!" declared Judith. "You have the same build and coloring and your voices are alike. Now, be still while I paint the scars on your face."

Swiftly, but with infinite care, her long clever fingers worked on Eric's face. With brush and grease paint and flesh-colored court plaster, she reproduced Sebastian's dreadful scars, line for line, gash for gash, twist for twist. And as she worked she instructed Eric in the ritual for dismissing the Devil-Worshipers to the long sleep that always intervened between the orgy and the sacrifice. The ritual was short and Eric mastered it just as she completed her task.

She led him up to a long mirror and his doubts of her plan left him as he gazed at his reflection. He would have sworn that it was his cousin who faced him in the mirror.

Judith detached from Sebastian's hand a strange ring of some flesh-colored metal, wide and thick like an old-fashioned wedding ring, with no stone or setting.

She slipped it on Eric's right hand where it seemed to become invisible, so closely did it resemble the human skin.

"If you cannot manage them, pass your hand through the altar fires and seize their leader," she told him. "But mind you must touch the devil-fire first."

Concluding that she, too, was tainted with all these evil terrors, he promised lightly.

Then she handed him Sebastian's heavy whip.

"Be violent," she warned, "Rage and storm and carry things with a high hand. That is how he keeps his hold on them. When you have dismissed them, come back here and we can plan to get out."

"What about Senta," asked Eric.

"We will hide in a place I know," answered Judith. Putting her arm around Senta, she looked straight into Eric's distrustful eyes. "If anything should happen to you, I will get her out of this place at any cost," she promised earnestly. "They shall not have her. Indeed, you can trust her to me."

"I believe I can," said Eric, clasping her hand.

Senta clutched his arm.

"If you're going into danger—I want to go, too. Oh, take me with you!" she implored as he caught her into his arms.

He kissed her once and put her down.

"That's impossible, sweetheart," he answered. "It would only increase the danger."

Making sure that his pistol was ready to hand, he closed the door behind him and went down the passage as Judith had directed.

The vast hall was in an uproar. The mob surged this way and that, some calling for one course of action, some for another, but all joined in execrating Sebastian. The very chaos was in his favor, Eric realized, as he stood unnoticed in the shadow of the Devil Statue. It behooved him to act quickly, before Julius or another could assume the leadership and weld all that disorganized malevolence into one death-dealing purpose.

With a swift leap, he cleared the now blazing altar fires and was standing upright on the altar before the frenzied horde knew he was near. There was an instant, deathlike silence. Those nearest the altar fell back.

Above the leaping flames, Eric gazed down into the sea of vicious faces, and watched their flushed hatred fade into cringing fear. For the first time he considered the faces individually, and with difficulty repressed a cry as he recognized in a creature with streaming hair and swollen features, a pretty débutante with whom he had danced a few nights ago. Several of the men he knew, too. Clubmen and men about town, like Schuyler Van Tassell, whose mutilated body now lay at his feet. The very common-placeness of their outward life made him realize how appallingly far the dreadful stream of pollution had run.

While they were still under the spell of his sudden appearance, he began the ritual of dismissal that Judith had taught him.

For a moment he was not interrupted. Then, with a yell in which hatred and fear and rage were equally blended, Julius sprang out from the crowd and stood in front of the altar.

"The flames of Hell cannot shield you!" he shrieked. "Death to the traitor—slow death!"

"Death!" howled the Devil-worshipers, surging forward. Eric laughed.

"Death!" he cried, in Sebastian's mocking tone. "Is that your worst? Then see what Satan's High Priest can inflict!"

Still closely imitating Sebastian's rather grandiloquent gestures, he swept his hand through the flames, seized Julius by the throat and jerked him up to the altar.

The agonized screech that burst from Julius, surprised Eric as much as it terrorized the Devil-Worshipers. He had merely been playing for time—bluffing, in fact—and he knew his grasp had not been sufficiently hard to cause such pain. For the man had fallen on his face, twisting and clutching his throat, but after that first cry, making no sound except a strangled whimper.

Forgetting his role, Eric set Julius on his feet, but almost dropped him at sight of his face. For he was smiling—a dreadful vacant smile. His hands fell away from his throat and he began to play idly with Eric's flowing sleeve, the whimpering merged into a hoarse tuneless humming.

The horrid abruptness with which the passionate, purposeful man had changed

into this driveling creature almost destroyed Eric's self-control.

As for the Devil-Worshipers, they flung themselves face downward, shrieking:

"The Judgment! We have seen it before! Have mercy, Sebastian! Have mercy, oh most dreadful Lord Satan!"

But Julius went on smiling and humming and watching the leaping flames.

Eric managed to pull himself together, again began the ritual of dismissal, and this time pursued it to its close.

But as he paused on the last words a sudden cry went up from the kneeling people. He turned. At the foot of the altar stood Sebastian. The Devil-Worshippers stared dazedly from the Sebastian on the altar to the Sebastian below it.

"There is the traitor!" cried Eric. But they only stared stupidly.

"Drag down that imposter," Sebastian commanded furiously.

It is a well-known fact that conflict of authority incites rebellion. The Worshipers, at first almost ready to believe that Sebastian's dreadful powers had enabled him to materialize another body, took courage at this sign of discord.

In vain Sebastian raved and stormed and quoted the devil ceremony to prove his identity; in vain Eric threatened and lashed at them with the whip and repeated the words Judith had taught him.

They crowded around the two sinister figures. Eric was standing beside Sebastian now, ready to bluff it out as long as possible.

"Don't you see?" shrieked the debutante suddenly. "One is really Sebastian—the other is the traitor!"

"But I tell you Sebastian is the traitor!" growled Carlos, the guard.

"He can't be," she pointed out. "Don't you remember that—Julius—" she shuddered and turned away her head —"said he had seen the traitor and would know his face?"

"But both these men have Sebastian's face!"

"Paint!" cried the debutante, who no doubt was well informed on such matters. "Wash their faces!"

"That ends it for me!" thought Eric as he and Sebastian were dragged struggling to one of the bowls of warm incense. "But why should Sebastian worry? It will put things right for him."

He was scrubbed with vicious energy and there was a cry of triumph as court-plaster and paint melted and the scars vanished from his face.

But to his amazement the cry was echoed by the group around Sebastian. It fell apart and in the midst stood Sebastian, his face as bare of scars as Eric's own.

For a time pandemonium raged.

"Death! Death!" shrieked the mob.

"No!" cried a few cautious ones. "The treasure first—make them find the treasure!"

Sebastian laughed. "If I had known where to find the treasure I would long ago have sent you to destruction!" he snarled into the faces of his captors.

So great was their fear of him still that for a moment they shrank back. And in that instant's pause a strain of wild music came faintly from somewhere within the Manor. Nearer and nearer it came, strangely disturbing in its fitful rhythm, and the fury of the devil-worshipers died as if under a spell. The strains broke into a wailing climax and a long sigh went up as Senta stood within the doorway. Her face was rigid and ghastly white, and her voice was strangely discordant as she chanted:

"Give me the condemned, oh ye People of the Pit. The dreadful power that fills my soul will deal with them through me."

Again there was a violent controversy. "It is ill-fortune to refuse the Victim!" clamored the debutante. "She can make them reveal the treasure, and besides, no one can escape from the Manor. The doors are guarded!"

This mingling of superstition and common sense, combined with the spell of the music, which still sounded hauntingly from the shadows, had its effect on the throng, who fell back as Eric and Sebastian walked slowly to where Senta stood. As they passed the debutante she leaned forward and hissed malignantly:

"Whichever you are, Sebastian, I'll see you tortured yet—you and that ugly Judith for whom you refused my love!"

Sebastian made no reply and the mob was silent as the two followed Senta out of the hall. Through winding passages they went without a word; and up and up a stairway enclosed by stone walls. A faint streak of light gleamed at the top; it widened suddenly, and Judith, violin in hand, stood in a lighted room. As they stepped in and the door closed noiselessly behind them they caught a glimpse of a peering malicious face, as one of the Devil-Worshipers mounted guard at the top of the stairs.

The room was round, and furnished with a couch and a chair. It was brightly lighted, but the air was heavy and stale; apparently there were no windows and the mouth of the wide tile-rimmed fireplace was covered with sheet-iron. Judith and Sebastian were engaged in a low impassioned conversation while Eric and Senta stared around the strange room. Eric turned suddenly to Sebastian.

"We must plan some way of escape," he said.

"Oh, of course we are enemies," he went on, "and if we once get out of here I'll see that you get what's coming to you, but just now we must work together."

Sebastian nodded. "Yes," he admitted reluctantly. "You must help me get Judith out of this."

"How?" asked Eric crisply. Then as Sebastian looked blank, "Surely you know some way out?" he cried.

Sebastian's face was ghastly. "They know all the secret exits," he stammered. "I had to tell them in case of a raid, which would have ruined me. I did keep one to myself but Van Tassell stumbled on it by accident and told the others." His face was suddenly convulsed. "Blast him!" he shrieked, clutching the air—"I'll—"

Judith's tender touch calmed him instantly.

"Talk of something else for a little while," Judith entreated in a low tone. "When he is calmer he will think of something."

Eric hesitated. But, realizing that Senta's chance of escape was largely dependent on the other two, he complied.

"What is this room?" he asked.

"The Round Tower," Judith replied absently, her anxious eyes on her husband's brooding face. "The room known as the Heart of the Manor."

Eric and Senta exchanged glances. Sebastian looked up.

"The Heart of the Manor," he repeated. "Old Torvald ate his heart out in this room—the canting hypocrite!"

"And you and Uncle Eldred assisted that operation?" Eric asked incisively.

"Yes!" cried Sebastian. "Oh, it doesn't matter, dearest! I'm through! We're all as good as dead—We paid him out for his 'reform' and for favoring your father—but we couldn't get him to tell about the treasure—but *you* know!" He roused himself suddenly and faced Eric. "Where is the treasure?"

"The treasure be damned!" cried Eric, almost beside himself with anxiety for Senta. "We've got to find a way out!"

"There is no way out—but one! And when we take that way, all in this accursed house will go with us! I know that way—we planned it years ago. Judith, my wife, we'll go that way together."

Judith stood beside his chair and pressed his head against her shoulder.

"I've been trying to think of some way out for you two," she told Eric. "But

I'm afraid—take off that ring!" she exclaimed suddenly as her glance fell on Eric's hand.

He looked down at the thick lead band. "Why?"

"It is poisoned. Heat releases the spring and when the poison is pressed into the throat it causes instant insanity."

Eric hastily drew off the ring, with a shuddering memory of Julius, and thrust it into his pocket.

"If you would only give up the treasure," urged Judith. "That would hold them off until we could think up something."

Eric fairly gritted his teeth. "I tell you I don't *know* where the treasure is!" he almost shouted. "I don't even know *what* it is. Doesn't he know?"

"Not where it is," replied Judith. "He found out through a spy in your lawyer's office, you were to inherit when you were thirty and found the note in your room, but that's all we know. Oh!" she cried piteously. "I wanted him to give it up and go away. None of those creatures would have known him without the scars—but he wanted the treasure for me, only for me." She pressed Sebastian's head closer against her shoulder. He seemed sunk in apathy and noticed nothing that was said. "He is always like this after those violent fits," said Judith, "and they are more and more frequent. He would be quite insane before long. I am glad we are going to die together while he still knows me." Her low, beautiful voice went on talking as if she were glad to unburden her mind. "In each generation there is always one Ericsson tainted with insanity—a very madness of wickedness, dating back to that wild sea-captain of the Chinese trading ship who learned devil-worship from his Eurasian wife."

The tragic monotone of her voice wrapped Senta in a kind of dream, but Eric was reloading his automatic.

"There's bound to be some way out," he began, when Senta clutched his arm.

There was the sound of many feet outside, the door swung open and a throng of devil-worshipers surged into the room. With a cry, the debutante pointed out Sebastian, who had thrown himself defensively in front of Judith.

"That's Sebastian!" shrieked the girl, "Take him first!" The madness had vanished from Sebastian's face and his blue eyes shone with a fighting-joy that found a swift response in Eric. For the second time he felt his kinship to Sebastian; the clan-call was strong in both of them as they stood shoulder to shoulder, strangely alike, facing their common enemy.

The next moment something black and clinging descended over Eric's head. He fought furiously, but many hands forced him down, binding his arms to his sides. From the confused sounds of trampling, thudding blows, groans, and the snarling laugh Eric had heard before, he knew Sebastian was giving his enemies a lively time, and he writhed in fury at his impotence to help.

A door slammed; the noises receded, and Eric felt his bonds give way. But when he sprang up like a steel spring released, he found only Senta and an empty room. He threw himself against the door, but he could not wrench it open. Then, more calmly, he turned to Senta.

"They dragged him away and Judith followed," Senta told him, shuddering. "They said they would come back for us later."

"They'll try to get the secret from him first," said Eric, "in which case they'll finish all of us at once. But they probably expect him to play some trick, and they're afraid to tackle us together."

"If we're going to die," said Senta, quietly, "let's not think of those dreadful creatures any more. Eric, he called this room the 'Heart of the Manor.' Let's try to find the treasure."

"How?"

Senta thought a moment, her gaze traveling slowly around. Suddenly her glance focused. She ran across the room and knelt before the tiled fireplace.

"Look!" she cried.

Eric bent down and saw with amazement that on every tile was carved a Biblical quotation. The letters were chipped and broken as if they had been wantonly defaced.

"Probably put there by Torvald Ericsson in one of his remorseful fits," mused Eric, "and defaced by Eldred or Sebastian."

Senta was earnestly deciphering the texts.

"'It lies in the heart of the Manor. No irreverent eyes may find it,'" she quoted softly.

Eric knelt beside her.

"You think this is the hiding place?" he asked with quickened interest.

Too absorbed to reply, Senta lingered over a small corner tile so near the floor that it had escaped the defacing hand.

"'Seek and ye shall find,'" with difficulty Senta made out the tiny dirt-encrusted letters. "'knock and it shall be opened unto you.'"

Tense with excitement she knocked three times on the little tile. But nothing happened. She gave a cry of disappointment, but Eric, struck with a sudden idea, took out his knife and carefully scraped away the dirt wedged around the eges. As the last fragment fell, the little tile slid out like a drawer and in the hole behind it was a long slender green box. When Senta brushed it clean of dust Eric saw that the box was made of pure jade, inlaid with rich red stones.

"Pigeon-blood rubies!" exclaimed Eric, whose adventures had given him a knowledge of jewels.

A breath of strange perfume was wafted to them as Senta lifted the lid. A narrow bundle of yellowed satin, a slender red-tipped rod, a roll of paper covered with writing—it looked somewhat disappointing. They caught up the time-stained paper whose faded writing was like that in the silver box. It seemed to be a kind of diary, though there were no dates, except the first twenty-five years back.

"Eldred is killing me," it began. "He began two weeks ago, when he learned that I was struggling to free my soul of the monstrous bonds that drag it down—I will serve no more, that I am resolved—but I do not hope for salvation—Salvation! Even the word is strange to me. This accursed house is like a plague-spot; it breeds death and ruin. As long as one stone stands upon another my soul must drag its awful weight of crime and misery. Eldred is giving me slow poison and he thinks I do not know. He is stupid; Sebastian is cleverer, though he is a boy—a vicious boy—how different from the sweet-faced little Eric. Oh, Sigmund, my splendid son! If I could see you only once again! If your mother had lived I could have fought the curse—but I was lonely and Eldred's gypsy mother was a devil, too. But Eric must not suffer. He must not marry wrongly. I have arranged it all for Eric. Senta is a mere baby now, but her grandmother was Sigmund's mother's dearest friend. It is good blood, clean and honorable. They will think Sigmund's mother left them the gray house, they are poor and romantic and so will accept the queer conditions. The search will bind the two young things together. They will lift the Curse.

Is there a Curse? Somehow, in the long hours I have spent here where Eldred has imprisoned me, I've come to know that the curse was not hereditary madness, but the madness that comes of violence and lack of self-control. Eldred wants the treasure. He knows I have hidden it, but he does not know that

while he thought he had me cooped up here I've made all arrangements with my lawyers and have hidden the silver box under the guide-stone! He wants the wand—but he shall never have it. Yet I dare not destroy it. I am afraid of it—I touch it and the old mad lust for power surges up in me. Eric! Eric! Destroy the wand before it wrecks your life!

It destroyed mine, and my father's, and his father the sea-captain, who had it of that beautiful accursed woman who has been the bane of our House. I have seen her in the devil-dances—she comes back to gloat over the evil she began—just one wicked half-breed witch-woman from an island of the sea. From her the stream of pollution has spread and spread. My repentance is too late, but Eldred shall not have the wand."

Eric stopped reading, reached for the narrow crystal rod, and examined it curiously. It was triangular and through its center ran a line of red, ending in an enormous ruby in its tip. As it grew warm in his hand Eric felt a tingle and glow like a contact with electricity. The transparent glass turned a smoky gray through which the red line pulsated like a fire. The whole rod was turning red and the smoky gray had spread into the room. Eric felt an upleap of the wild arrogance that had swept over him in the great hall. His brain was fired with vast shadowy visions of evil powers; out of the gray mists that seemed to swirl about him, he saw a face emerge.

Beautiful, alluring, challenging, it bent over him and he noted without distaste the sinister slant of the lustrous eyes, the yellowish tinge of the round face, the cruel curves of the full red mouth. Suddenly the smiling face darkened into a furious scowl: at the same instant Eric felt a cool touch on his burning hand.

"Eric!" cried the voice he loved best. "Eric! Destroy the wand!"

In the ensuing minute it seemed to Eric that opposing forces were tearing him to pieces. With a mighty effort, he dashed the wand to the floor and ground it to fragments under his heel; he seemed to hear a far-off clang as if some great door slammed; the gray mists swirled away, and he found himself kneeling before Senta, his hot face buried in her little cool hands.

"Did you see—it?" he gasped.

"There was nothing," she told him gently, "but your face—oh Eric! The look in your eyes!"

"It will never come again," he promised earnestly. Then, to shake off the spell (for the heady perfume still floated up from the shattered rod), he caught up the bundle of soft satin. It unrolled with a jerk and there fell from it a great rope of many-colored jewels; almost six feet long, it stretched its shining length along the floor. The satin wrapping settled into a soft heap from which a dazzling flame flashed out. Eric hastily shook the yellowed folds and caught up the glittering thing that fell from them. It was a narrow hoop of gold set with a diamond of such marvelous lustre that a shimmering rose-fire seemed to flame and glow within it.

"The Ericsson Rose Diamond!" gasped Eric. "My great-grandmother's engagement ring." He unrolled a slip of paper twisted through the ring and read: "*'Show this to my lawyer.'* It is worth a fortune itself," commented Eric, "and so is that rope of jewels. No wonder Sebastian—"

Senta clutched his arm.

"Eric, how did your grandfather slip out of here to see his lawyer?"

Eric dived for the manuscript and rapidly turned the pages.

"Perhaps he mentions the secret way," he explained. "Yes—listen! *'I escape at will from the Round Tower room, but I always go back—I want to die, yet dare not kill myself. The secret way is found by pressing the tiles third from the top and second from the bottom on the side where this is hidden. Pray for me!'*"

Eric dropped the manuscript and pressed the tiles described. Slowly and gratingly, the entire chimney-piece swung out from the wall. Stuffing the jewels into his capacious pocket, he caught Senta's hand and hurried her into the dark opening. Down a long flight of steps they went, and through a seemingly endless tunnel, then up more steps until Eric's tall head struck against some kind of roof. His groping hands felt the outlines of a door, then a big iron key, which was very difficult to turn.

He succeeded at last and by an effort that taxed even his great strength, he forced open the door. A gust of sharp fresh air rushed in and a faint light filtering through bushes and vines. He tore these obstacles aside and crawled with Senta out of a door in the hillside and into the road that ran past Ericsson Manor.

So utterly had they lost all sense of time that it was hardly a surprise to find that the day was over. The autum twilight was closing in; a chill breeze blew, and in the darkening sky a crescent moon was shining. The two who had just escaped from the inferno of that dreadful house, stood hand in hand, silently breathing in the almost holy serenity and peace of the scene.

Suddenly the air was shattered by an appalling detonation. The old Manor House far down the lane of trees rocked and swayed, then tumbled in on itself and crashed to the earth; the air was filled with smoke, hurtling stones and flying masonry and uprooted trees.

Eric and Senta were thrown to the ground, but Eric managed to drag Senta back through the hillside door and in the shelter of the tunnel they crouched until the storm of missiles was past.

When they ventured outside at last the place where Ericsson Manor had stood so long was only a deep pit in the midst of a bare plain piled with jagged stones.

"Sebastian set off his mine," said Eric.

"Poor Judith," whispered Senta, tears running down her face. "But they went together as they wanted to go—and that's all that matters."

Eric caught her closer to him.

"To be together—that's all that matters," he repeated. He slipped something on her finger and Senta saw the glow of the Rose Diamond.

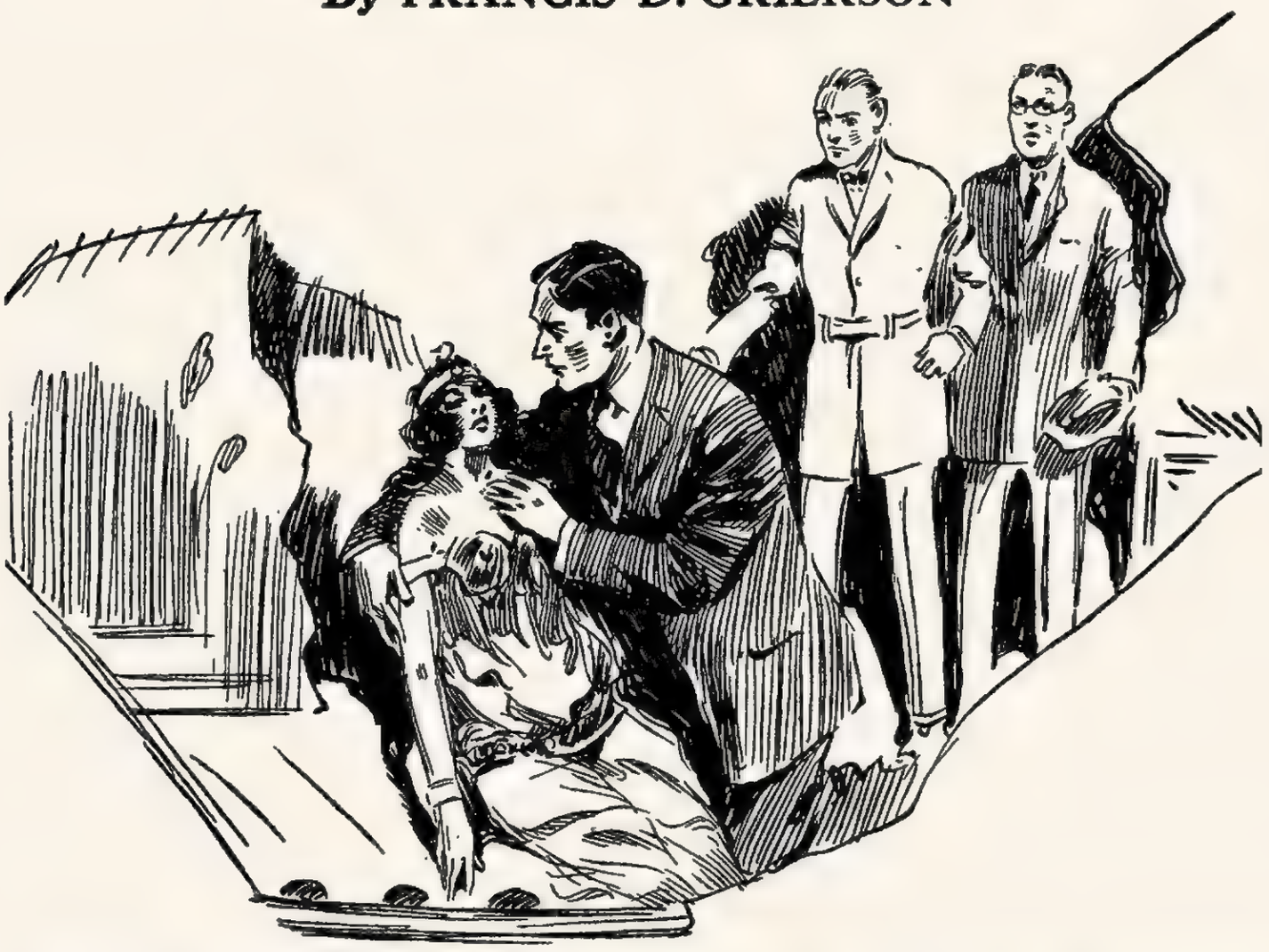
A little later Eric found his car, which he had parked in the road outside the big gate. It was battered and bent, but he managed to make it go, and in the starlit dusk they drove away.

Devil Manor was gone, with all its evil horde, and perhaps old Thorvald's soul found rest at last.

THE END

The Case of the Golden Lily

By FRANCIS D. GRIERSON



"PAUL," said Lord Oakby deliberately, "I really believe I am the happiest fellow alive!"

Paul Pry smiled.

"That is a very comfortable frame of mind," he answered, in his quiet way.

"Confound you!" cried Oakby, laughing. "You're a jolly old cynic at forty—is it forty, by the way? I never know whether you're thirty or fifty, Paul. I don't believe you've ever been in love."

Cracking a walnut as he spoke, he did not observe the sudden cloud that darkened the pleasant face opposite him. It vanished as quickly as it had come, and Paul spoke cheerfully:

"Well, well," he said, "I am not too cynical to enjoy your happiness, my dear fellow; and I do not wonder at it. You are young, fit and engaged to be married to a very charming girl. Here's to her!"

He sipped his port, and his friend drained his glass.

"By Jove, that's a stunning port!" cried Oakby. "It's—it's worthy of her," he added.

"It has been paid many compliments," Paul answered, "but that is the greatest of them all. But come," he added, "it's time we were going. The rest of the show is nothing to you, but I confess I rather like the Nadia's dancing—though of course she's not to be compared to Carol."

"Of course not," replied Lord Oakby naively, and again Paul chuckled as he rang for the car.

As they drove to the theater Mr. Paul Pry, that singular mixture of cynicism and good nature, reflected with satisfaction on the part he had played in Oakby's romance. Millionaire and amateur criminologist, Paul was a mystery; even the name by which he was so well known in half a dozen countries was an obvious pseudonym.

As Oakby's father, the Earl of Glenash, once said of him: "He goes everywhere and knows everybody, but nobody knows him"; nevertheless, the noble Earl was quite content to accept this state of affairs, for—like many others—he had his private reasons for entertaining for Paul a regard which was not free from gratitude.

When young Lord Oakby, the Earl's heir, cast his title at the pretty feet of Miss Carol Spring, the dancer who was filling the Quality Theater night after night, the old nobleman was at first furious, but Paul, like a god out of the car, appeared in his unexpected way and applied balm to the Earl's wound. Carol Spring, it appeared, was in no way unworthy of the coronet proposed for her. Her father, a gallant officer who had served with distinction in the Great War,

had at last succumbed to the after-effects of a severe wound, leaving his motherless daughter barely enough means to live on. Paul, who had known Major Spring in earlier days, had heard of his condition only a few days before his death, but he had been in time to relieve the dying man's mind of anxiety regarding his daughter.

Carol at nineteen was the incarnate fragrance of a rose in June. Since her father died, two years before, she had lived in the care of the elderly lady who acted as Paul's housekeeper in London. Believing that the best cure for the girl's terrible loneliness was occupation, Paul sought to give her an interest in life.

She had always, he found, loved music, and her voice, though not powerful, was pleasing. At her request, Paul enabled her to enter school where would-be actresses learned the elements of their art, and there the directress, a shrewd woman, discovered where Carol's real talent lay.

"Miss Spring," she wrote to Paul, "might make a passable actress. She has a certain charm, a nice voice and a good figure. But I feel bound, against my own interests, to tell you that she is wasting her time here. Take her to a good professor of dancing; don't let him —if I may advise—try to turn her into a posture-maker; she is not a ballet-dancer, and never will be. But let him teach her just enough technique to frame the picture of her genius. She dances because to dance expresses the sunshine of her soul. You will think me a sentimental old fool to write like this . . ."

But Paul did not think so; nor did the gray-haired Italian to whom he took Carol.

Under her master's skillful guidance, Carol was spared the long hours of painful posturing which make the great ballerina, but she retained and developed her natural poetry of movement, and one day the Signor came to Paul and told him that his pupil was ready to be shown to the world.

Vivian Dale, the owner and manager of the Quality Theater, was a friend of Paul. Skeptically—for he had so frequently had young prodigies hurled at his head, and had so often found them, as he said, to possess feet, not of clay, but apparently of lead—he came to the great bare room where the Signor, the girl and Paul awaited him.

Without preamble, the old maestro took up his violin and played a simple, haunting air, and Carol began to dance —nervously at first, but as the rhythm gripped her she forgot everything but the music, and danced, as she always did, "from the soul of her," in the Signor's phrase.

Vivian Dale watched her in silence until the last note had died away. Then he rose and took both the girl's hands in his.

"Miss Spring," he said, "it is not my way to pay compliments. I believe you have a great future before you. If you like, I will put you on at my theater at once."

Amazed and half frightened at this sudden realization of her ambitions, Carol blushed and murmured some confused words.

"This is very kind, Dale," said Paul, coming to her aid, but the other interrupted him.

"By no means," he said. "For your sake, my dear Paul, I was willing to come and see Miss Spring dance, but even for your sake I could not imperil the reputation that I think I may say I have built up for the Quality Theater. But, if I am any judge, Miss Spring is going to justify my faith in her. If you will both come round to my office tomorrow, I will have a contract prepared, and we can discuss the details of an idea that I think should be effective."

THE Quality Theater had justly won its place in the public estimation as a theater that put quality before quantity, and Vivian Dale had a remarkable power of combining the highest artistry with popularity. His great spectacles were mounted magnificently, and his present play, "Love o' the Ages," had been running for over a year. In it there appeared Mademoiselle Nadia Raskolnikovna, a beautiful Russian, whose "Storm" dance had set London talking. Dale, with characteristic audacity, decided to introduce a striking contrast; Carol, he resolved, should appear immediately after the passionate Russian in a "Sunshine" dance in which he believed that her fresh sweetness and artless gaiety would, in theatrical phrase, bring down the house.

The great posters bearing in huge letters the single word

NADIA

were alternated with others on which were printed

CAROL

and artistic half-hints to the Press piqued public curiosity.

The stage effects were cleverly planned. In a charming woodland scene Carol appeared, clad in a simple white robe, and danced in a flood of warmly-tinted light. At the end of her dance she took from an attendant concealed at the wings a great golden lily, in the center of which was fixed an electric globe of delicate rose-pink shade. Flitting to the front of the stage, she slowly raised the lily to her face, pressed a spring, and the warm glow suffused her cheeks and neck with the effect of a charming blush.

On the night of Carol's first appearance Paul Pry sat in his box, concealing under his habitual sang froid a nervousness almost as great as that of his young ward in her dressing-room behind the scenes. Dale looked in for a minute and clapped him on the shoulder.

"She'll be great, Paul; you'll see," was all he said, and Paul heaved a sigh of relief, for Dale was rarely enthusiastic.

Young Oakby, whom Paul had brought along with him, for he liked the boy's hearty cheeriness, laughed.

"Buck up, Paul," he said. "I'm sure Miss Spring will be top-hole. I'm quite anxious to see her, you know, and I'm prepared to shout myself hoarse to help the applause."

Paul smiled, and turned to watch the Nadia as she began her dance. Tall, with rounded limbs and the magnificent bosom of a fully matured woman, she moved with the assurance of perfect training. She was wrapped in a red cloak, but as the music grew louder and louder, and great crashes of simulated thunder were heard, she cast the garment from her, and stood forth in a bronze sheathing which accentuated the beauties of her splendid body.

The dance ended in a gesture of passionate abandon, and she was recalled again and again to bow her acknowledgments of tremendous applause.

The curtain descended, to rise again in a few moments on the woodland glade into which wandered, after a pause, a slim figure in white. For a moment she stood, a hand at her breast, and looked vaguely into the great darkened auditorium in which she could distinguish nothing. Something in her wistful look set a woman sobbing, and in a moment an encouraging round of applause broke out. Dimly understanding that they were bidding her take courage, she smiled, and then the music recalled her to herself and she began to dance—slowly at first, but presently with the joyous spontaneity of youth.

Young Oakby, who had started when she first appeared, locked his hands together and followed her with his eyes as she flitted about the great stage with the graceful movements of a fawn. When, taking the golden lily, she lifted it to her lips and stood motionless before her judges, he sprang to his feet and cheered with an utter forgetfulness that would have been conspicuous had it not been shared by everybody in the theater.

Dale had been right.

Carol received such an ovation as comes to few, and next morning she awoke to find herself famous.

When the curtain fell for the last time Lord Oakby turned to Paul and said simply:

"Paul, I want to meet that girl."

Paul looked thoughtfully at him, noting with approval the steady eyes and firm mouth.

"You shall," he said.

In three months they were engaged to be married, for the Earl, finding that the "dancing girl" was the daughter of a gentleman and the ward of a man for whom he had a profound respect, consented to see her. After the interview, the old man became, as Paul said, almost as eager for the marriage as his son.

REMEMBERING these things, Paul smiled happily to himself as he and Oakby drove to the theater to see Carol give her last performance. On the morrow she bade adieu to the stage, to become the Viscountess Oakby.

The theater was crowded to its utmost capacity when they entered their box, and Lord Oakby sat back to endure the boredom of waiting until Carol should appear. But Paul leaned forward to watch the beautiful Russian as she swayed voluptuously in time to the music of her dance. He knew the type—imperious, passionate, quick to love and to hate. A dozen times he had seen such women playing sinister parts in dramas of love and crime. He watched her with the same mixture of admiration and repulsion as he would have felt at the sight of a magnificent tigress.

At last the curtain fell, and Oakby's eyes sparkled as the conductor signaled to his orchestra. The great curtain rose again, and a storm of plaudits greeted Carol's appearance.

Never had she danced so well; she was a butterfly, fluttering from blossom to blossom, a fairy, treading a magic measure on the enchanted sward.

At last the dance drew to its close. Snatching the golden lily from the attendant's hands, she advanced to the footlights. A hundred times before she had raised the lily to her lips with the same gesture, but tonight, turning toward the box in which, as the great audience knew, there sat the man she loved, she held the lily to him with outstretched hands, in a shy yet proud admission of her surrender.

In instant sympathy with the girl's movement, a burst of cheering broke out—only to be strangled at its birth. For as she pressed the spring which illuminated the lily, a blinding flash leaped from it, and the globe was shattered into a thousand fragments.

For a moment Carol stood holding the stem of the golden lily; then, with a little cry, she fell, a crumpled, pitiful wisp of white on the green carpet.

Quickly as Lord Oakby sprang to the door of the box, Paul was before him, and the two men raced up the corridor, through the entrance to the wings and on to the stage, where Vivian Dale, Crawdell, the stage manager, Nadia and a dozen others were gathered about the prostrate girl.

Pushing quickly through the group, Lord Oakby raised Carol in his strong arms, and carried her to her dressing-room, followed by Paul and Dale. In a moment they were joined by Doctor Saunders, the doctor retained by the management, who had fortunately been one of those who had come to see Carol's final stage triumph.

The others stood in silent suspense as the medical man made his examination. At last he turned to them.

"Ye'll not need to be alar-rmed," he said, in his dry, Scotch manner. "'Tis shock the girl's suffering from, chiefly. 'Tis a mercy you thing wasna nearer to her face . . ."

It might have been an accident that his eyes rested on Paul as he spoke. The latter, whispering a few words to Dale, left the room hurriedly, and the others watched the doctor as he applied restoratives.

In a few minutes Carol stirred and opened her eyes. Dr. Saunders, smiling quizzically, motioned to Oakby, who sprang forward and knelt beside the couch, pillowing the girl's head on his arm.

"Arthur!" she murmured, happily, and the doctor and Vivian Dale found important business to discuss in another corner of the room.

Barely a quarter of an hour had passed when Paul returned, to find his ward almost herself again, and coloring with pleasure at hearing that the great audience had refused to leave the theater until they had heard from Dale's lips that their idol had suffered no serious injury.

"I think," said Paul, significantly, "that Doctor Saunders will forgive my poaching on his preserves if I suggest that Carol would be none the worse for a rest. Meanwhile, Dale and I have a little matter to attend to. Perhaps you will be good enough to join us in Dale's office, Doctor?"

Leaving Carol, still too shaken to pay much attention to what was going on, though little the worse for her experience, in the charge of her dresser and her fiance, Paul led the way to the comfortable room in which Dale transacted the business of the theater. Awaiting them they found Mademoiselle Nadia and Gilbert Crawdell. The actress and the stage manager were chatting easily together, but the shrewd Scottish doctor fancied that he perceived a certain anxiety beneath their light manner.

Paul, entering last, very composedly locked the door and handed the key to Vivian Dale, who took it and placed it on the writing table at which he seated himself.

"You weesh to see me, M'siu Dale?" asked Nadia, haughtily, who had watched these proceedings with scornful eyes.

"I did," replied Dale briefly. "Be good enough to sit down. Now, Mr. Pry . . ."

He paused expectantly.

Paul, whose pleasant face had grown very stern, nodded.

"I am obliged to you," he said, "for acting so promptly on my hint. I find that I was justified in my suspicions, and I think you will be surprised at what I have to tell you."

"*Je suis fatiguée,*" protested Nadia, yawning. "If Mr. Pry like to tell a story I beg to be excusé—"

"Sit down!" said Paul sharply.

He did not raise his voice, but there was something in his cold, stern tone that silenced the woman, who paled beneath her rouge as she sank into her chair.

CRAWDELL, who had not spoken nor moved, took out his handkerchief and wiped his damp hands.

"It is not often," Paul resumed, "that one is able so quickly to solve what is undoubtedly an unusual problem; I have, however, been fortunate, and I hope that my explanation need occupy little more time than my investigations.

"I should first explain that I was not unaware that Mademoiselle Nadia was jealous of Carol. That, perhaps, was to be expected. Women like Mademoiselle do not lightly see their own fame eclipsed by that of another—however innocently. But I confess that I was not prepared for the ingenuity with which she attempted to revenge herself. With true feminine subtlety, she waited for the evening of her rival's final triumph, and hoped to deal her a worse blow than death.

"A tool was ready to her hand. Crawdell, as I had already observed, was passionately in love with her—so passionately that when she offered herself to him as the price of his help, he forgot his manhood, his honor, and helped her in one of the cruelest schemes I have ever heard of.

(*Continued on page* 90)

Beginning a Series of Remarkable Articles

WEIRD CRIMES

No. 1—Bluebeard

Compiled from Transcripts of the Judicial Records of the Ancient Duchy of Brittany

By SEABURY QUINN

NOT long ago the world was startled by the revelations of the trial of Henri Landru, accused of murdering ten women and an eighteen-year-old boy. "Bluebeard" the newspapers dubbed him, comparing him to the most grisly character in all the fairy tales.

How few of those who echoed the news writer's epithet realized that Landru, who later expiated his crimes upon the guillotine at Versailles, and even the "Bluebeard" whose story still frightens fretful children to stillness, were but amateurs in crime compared to the man who first bore the name; the man whose trial and conviction rocked Mediaeval France to its foundations, and whose criminal exploits surpass the wildest flights of imaginative fiction! Never in the stories of Poe, of Gautier, of de Maupassant—not even Bram Stoker's Count Dracula—has a character more depraved, more terrible, more fascinating, been portrayed than Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz, Marshal of France, chamberlain to the French king and cousin to the mighty Duke of Brittany.

"The most monstrously depraved imagination," says a French criminologist, "never could have conceived what this trial reveals. This memorable trial presents horrors unsurpassed in the entire volume of the world's history."

During the year 1440 terrible rumors spread through Brittany, especially through the ancient *pays de Retz*, which extends along the Loire from Nantes to Paimboeuf.

In hundreds of peasant cottages mothers wept for children they would see no more, and at the village inns, when the laborers repaired from their fields to drink an evening cup of wine, whispered curses, mingled with sighs and exclamations of grief, were heard. And always, when the peasants muttered their sullen complaints to each other, the name of the Sire de Retz was whispered.

In that day the great feudal lords owned the common people almost as absolutely as they owned the land itself, and the Sire de Retz's chateau was strong, his men at arms were many. What could a handful of wooden-shod peasants, armed only with scythes and flails, avail against the King's favorite?

But one last hope remained to the peasantry. Though the chivalry of France was a mighty institution, the Church of Rome was mightier. No noble, be his sword ever so long or his arrogance so great, dared lay hand upon the humblest village priest; and to their spiritual advisers the peasants betook themselves when their pleas to the civil authorities fell on deaf ears.

Word was borne to Jean de Chateaugiron, Bishop of Nantes, that oppression lay heavy upon his people in Brittany, and, like the energetic prince of the church he was, the bishop despatched his agents to investigate the reports.

Gilles de Laval, the investigators found, had suddenly quit a most promising career at court to immure himself in his country seat at Machecoul, a gloomy chateau, composed of huge towers and surrounded by deep moats. Also, since his residence in the country, he had deeded vast tracts of land to John V. Duke of Brittany, in order, it was whispered, to prevent that nobleman's too close scrutiny of his actions.

While the marshal kept closely to his house most of the time, he was wont to make occasional trips to nearby towns, always accompanied by a princely retinue. He spent money with a lavish hand, enriching inn-keepers and tradesmen beyond their wildest dreams, and distributing vast sums of gold to the poor.

It might have been supposed that the townspeople would have welcomed his coming as a visitation from the good Saint Nicholas himself. Yet, the bishop's agents found, whenever the marshal left a town, the cries of the poor, which had been restrained while the clank of his men at arms sounded in the streets, broke forth. Tears flowed, curses were uttered; a long-continued wail went up to heaven. Mothers had lost their children, babes had been snatched from the cradle, infants had been spirited almost from their mothers' breasts; and it was known by sad experience that the vanished little ones would never be seen again.

De Retz's castle at Machecoul was always in condition to resist siege. The drawbridge was raised, the portcullis down, the gates closed, the retainers constantly under arms. No one, except the marshal's own servants, the investigators heard, had even been known to go through the chateau's mysterious gates and come forth alive.

In the surrounding country strange tales of horror and deviltry circulated in hushed whispers. Yet it was observed that the chapel of the castle was gorgeously decked with silk and cloth of gold and the sacred vessels were encrusted with gems. The excessive devotion of the marshal was also noted. He was said to be passionately fond of ecclesiastical music and to hear mass three times daily.

But when dusk settled over the forest, and one by one the castle windows became illuminated, peasants would point to one casement, high up in an isolated tower from which a clear light streamed through the gloom. They told of a fierce red glare which came from that window at times, and of agonized cries—children's cries—ringing from it; cries which had no answer but the howl of the wolf as he rose to quest and kill his prey by night.

ONCE or twice a week the drawbridge was lowered and the servants of de Retz stood at the gateway distributing clothes, money and food to the beggars who crowded round. It often happened

that children were among those beggars; the servants would offer them rare dainties if they would go to the kitchen for them. Those little tots who accepted the offers were never seen again.

Charges had been laid before the duke of Brittany, accusing the marshal as a wholesale murderer of children. The duke had treated the accusations and the accusers alike with scorn.

When this report was laid before the bishop, he summoned Pierre de l'Hospital, grand-seneschal of Brittany, for a conference. Together they demanded that the duke order the arrest of the marshal on a charge of murder, threatening action by the church if he refused. Reluctantly the duke had Pierre de l'Hospital proceed with the prosecution. Action followed immediately. A *sergent d'armes* was given a warrant authorizing him to take "the very mighty, very powerful Sire de Retz and his accomplices" into custody.

Jean Labbé, the sergeant, was a man worthy of the master he served. Though warned that resistance would likely be encountered at the chateau, he selected a posse of twenty chosen men and marched to the castle gate, calling lustily upon the Sire de Retz to surrender.

"Who calls?" demanded the marshal, from behind the portcullis.

"Labbé," replied the sergeant drawing his sword.

The marshal turned pale, crossed himself and ordered the drawbridge lowered, saying, "It is impossible to resist fate."

Years before an astrologer had warned him he would one day fall into the hands of an abbé. Until the moment the sergeant demanded his surrender, the marshal had supposed the prophecy meant he would one day become a monk.

Accompanied by two of his retainers who had been his inseparable companions, Henriet and Pontou by name, the marshal crossed the drawbridge and handed his sword to Jean Labbé.

Closely guarded by the sergeant's posse, the accused men made their way to Nantes, where Pierre de l'Hospital waited to dispense stern and even-handed justice.

It was well for the Sire de Retz that Labbé had brought his score of dauntless peace officers with him. When word passed among the villagers that the redoubted Gilles de Laval was riding toward Nantes, surrounded by a bodyguard of *agents d'armes,* peasants left their fields, women their kitchens, and laborers dropped their tools to throng the streets.

" 'Way!" cried Jean Labbé, "give way to the servants of my Lord Bishop!"

A sullen murmur from the crowd answered him.

Suddenly a woman's shrill scream rent the noonday calm.

"My child!" she shrieked. "Accursed of God, restore my child!"

Then a wild, wrathful howl broke from the crowd, rang along the Nantes road, and died away only when the great gates of the Chateau de Bouffay clanged shut behind the prisoner.

THE whole population of Nantes was in a turmoil. It was whispered the investigation would be a farce. The duke would surely screen his kinsman. The Sire de Retz would be forced to surrender some more of his land, perhaps; after that he would be released. Justice weighed heavily only on the poor.

Sure enough, an attempt was made to shield the accused. Jean de Toucheronde, whose office it was to collect evidence against the prisoners was approached by the duke and told that it would be pleasing to that great nobleman if the evidence was so colored as to render the charge on which de Retz would be tried less than capital.

But the duke reckoned without the Bishop of Nantes and Pierre de l'Hospital, grand-seneschal of Brittany. These fearless exponents of justice summoned de Toucheronde before them.

"Monsieur," said de l'Hospital, fixing his penetrating black eyes on the lawyer, "your duty lies plain before you. See to it that it be well performed."

The bishop fingered the jeweled cross suspended from his neck by its golden chain.

"You have taken an oath to do equal justice to rich and poor, Monsieur," he reminded de Toucheronde. "Excommunication may be the penalty for oath-breaking."

Criminal procedure then in vogue in France differed from that of England in that the accused was not permitted to confront his accusers face to face at the trial. Evidence for the prosecution was taken before a commissioner, especially nominated for that purpose, then reduced to writing. The transcript of this testimony was then transmitted to the trial justice, who summoned the accused before him, read a brief summary of the offense of which he was charged, and proceeded to examine him.

No opportunity was afforded the prisoner for cross-examination of the prosecution's witnesses, nor was he informed of the nature of their testimony. It remained for the judge to piece together the stories of the prosecution and defense, deciding for himself whether the prisoner had adequately refuted the testimony of his accusers. Such a thing as trial by jury was undreamed of anywhere outside of England.

Manifestly unfair as this procedure was in many respects, it had one advantage lacked by the common law system: the accused was unable to invent false testimony with which to meet unexpected statements made by the prosecution's witnesses.

The investigation opened on the morning of September 18, 1440. The witnesses were introduced into the hall of justice singly, or in groups if they were relations. On entering the room, each witness knelt before the commissioner, kissed the crucifix, and swore with his hand on the Gospels that he would speak the truth and nothing but the truth. After this he related all the facts in his knowledge pertaining to the case, without being either interrogated or interrupted.

The first to present herself was Perrine Loessard, living at la Roche-Bernard. Tears streaming down her face, she related how, two years before, in the month of September, the Sire de Retz, with all his retinue, passed through la Roche-Bernard. She lived opposite the house where the nobleman stopped. Her child, a lad of ten, the finest in the village, had attracted the attention of de Retz as he stood at a window, leaning on his squire's shoulder.

Pontou, de Retz's servant, spoke to the boy, asking him what he intended to be when he grew up.

"A soldier," the lad replied.

"Very well," Pontou answered, "come with me, and I will give you a sword."

The child entered the house with Pontou for the coveted weapon—and was never seen again.

Deposition followed deposition, always to the same effect. Parents had left their houses, sometimes only for a few moments; when they returned their children were gone. An old beggar woman, once subsisting on the peasant's alms, had been observed going toward the castle at evening many times, accompanied by children. She invariably returned alone. In a few months, from some unknown source, she had amassed a competence, moved from the neighborhood, and was seen no more.

Thirty children had disappeared from a single village within a year.

And the victims were always boys. No girl child had been molested.

So frequent had the kidnappings become that parents dared not send children to tend sheep or goats, or carry food to their fathers or brothers working in the fields.

When Jean Labbé went to the chateau to arrest de Retz, Perrine Loessard, half crazed with grief at the loss of her child, had accompanied him. Entering a stable while the sergeant's guard was there to protect her, she had found a heap of ashes and powder which gave off a sickly and peculiar smell. At the bottom of a trough she found a child's shirt half burned, the remaining portion caked with dried blood.

AFTER several days spent in taking similar testimony, the prosecution announced its case complete, and court was opened to hear what defense Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz and marshal of France, had to offer to the dastardly crimes charged against him.

The marshal entered the court room dressed in doublet and hose of white satin, thickly sewn with seed pearls. About his neck hung several golden collars, emblems of his orders of knighthood. On his breast a half-score military decorations blazed, for the Sire de Retz had been a mighty warrior of France before he took up his abode in the country and became the object of terrible suspicions.

On a dozen hotly contested fields he had led the French forces to victory, and had engaged in the siege of Orleans with Jeanne d'Arc, entering the castle's moat with her, and being severely wounded by an English pikeman. Upon his head was a cap of ermine, the royal fur, which none but the king and a few of his most valued nobles were privileged to wear.

No one at first glance would have thought the Sire de Retz capable of such horrid crimes as those of which he stood accused. His face was somewhat pale, and wore, in repose, an expression of gentle melancholy.

But his beard was his outstanding characteristic. In sharp contrast to his hair and mustache, which were light, almost blonde, it was jet-black. Yet in certain lights it assumed a blue hue. It was this peculiarity which earned for the Sire de Retz the surname of Bluebeard—a name that has attached to him in popular romance since the Middle Ages, though his story had undergone a strange change, remaining in general memory only as the ghastly fairy tale which frightens children today.

Mild and gentle as de Retz's face appeared at first glance, however, a closer inspection revealed an innate cruelty. In his eyes there always smoldered a lurking, sinister expression, which now and again glowed like charcoal embers when blown upon by the fire-bellows. At such times he ground his teeth, like a wild beast about to leap upon its prey, and his lips became so contracted they showed pale and bloodless against his beard. Then it was his beard appeared to bristle and show its blue shade more than ever, and his face paled to a corpse-gray. After a few moments his features became serene again; a sweet smile reposed on the lips which had, a moment before, been set in a diabolical snarl, and his expression relapsed into a vague and tender melancholy.

"Messieurs," said the marshal, lifting his furred cap and saluting his judges with formal politeness, "pray expedite my matter as quickly as possible. I would that my unfortunate case be soon disposed of, for I am peculiarly anxious to consecrate myself to God's service. He has pardoned my sins, and I would even enter a monastery and become a monk. Fear not; I shall richly endow several of the churches of Nantes, and shall distribute the greater portion of my goods among the poor, the better to secure the salvation of my soul."

Had this been Spain, where religious fervor swayed even the actions of courts of justice, the Sire de Retz's plea might easily have operated to discontinue the prosecution. But the Frenchman is as practical in things spiritual as in things temporal.

"Monsigneur," gravely replied Pierre de l'Hospital, "it is ever well to think of the salvation of one's soul; but you will please remember that we are now concerned with the salvation of your body."

A look of impatience flitted across the face of Gilles de Retz.

"I have confessed to the father superior of the Carmelites," he answered. "Through his absolution I have been able to communicate. I am therefore guiltless and purified."

Pierre de l'Hospital drummed noiselessly on the polished table before him with his finger-tips. True servant of the church though he was, this talk of confession and purification pleased him not at all. Today he was sitting in the secular capacity of judge; the body of a man accused of killing the bodies of helpless children was on trial before him. Let the superior of the Carmelites supervise the welfare of the prisoner's soul. He, Pierre de l'Hospital, would perform the earthly office.

"Man's justice is not in common with that of God," he said finally. "Nor, though you were forty times confessed and shriven, can I tell you what your sentence will be till I have heard the evidence in your case. Be ready, then, to make your defense, and listen carefully to the charges brought against you."

He nodded to the court's clerk, who rose and unrolled a parchment scroll.

"HEAR ye, Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz, councillor to his Majesty, the King, and Marshal of France," read the priest. "Forasmuch as it has come to our ears that ye have seized and caused to be seized the bodies of several little children of the diocese of Nantes, not only ten or twenty, but thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, one hundred, two hundred and more: and have murdered them with inhuman tortures, afterwards burning their bodies to ashes, we do charge and adjure you true answer to make to these charges and say whether ye be guilty or not guilty of these abominable doings."

The grave eyes of Pierre de l'Hospital never left the prisoner's face while the indictment was being read.

"What justification can you make?" he asked. "Take an oath on the Holy Gospels to declare the truth."

"Not I!" exclaimed the marshal haughtily. "The witnesses are bound to declare their testimony on oath; but I, the accused, need take no oath. I will make no answer."

Pierre de l'Hospital rose from his chair, gathering his scarlet robes of office about him. He was a small man, wiry and quick as a terrier, and with something of the terrier's nervous activity in his movements. His great head, with its high, white brow seemed to weigh down his diminutive body. His eyes, large and black, have been likened to pools of new ink, and truly, like the ink, they recorded everything. These eyes he fixed on de Retz in an unwinking stare.

"Do you refuse to plead?" he asked in a voice of ominous calm.

"I do!" thundered the marshal, the deathlike pallor which told of his ungovernable temper beginning to spread over his face. "I am Marshal of France; I am—"

Pierre de l'Hospital stretched out a scarlet-clad arm and pointed to a baize curtain hanging near the judges' bench. The portiere swung back, revealing an alcove, recessed from the main chamber. In it was a long, low bench of dark wood, worn smooth and polished by much use. At either end were curious rope-and-ring attachments, and above it was a windlass over which the ropes wound.

Standing beside the instrument were two men in close-fitting tights of brown stuff, uncouth headgear, masking their faces. Through the eye-holes in their masks they watched Pierre de l'Hospital expectantly.

Gilles de Retz glanced once through the uncurtained doorway, and cast a look of murderous hate at his judge. But a pallor more sallow than that of rage overspread his face; for the low wooden bench in the alcove was the rack, and the masked men beside it were the official torturers of the court.

Gilles de Retz, who delighted in the sight of suffering children, and joyed in the sound of their death-moans, had no stomach for the rack.

"I will answer," he said, attempting to compose his features. "Torture me not, good Monsier de l'Hospital, I implore you.

"As to the charges I shall say nothing. They are simply false and calumnious."

"Indeed?" answered his judge. "And am I to believe that all these people who complain of having lost their children lied under oath?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the marshal, his equanimity restored, now that the curtain had been again drawn before the rack. "What am I to know of their brats? Am I their keeper?"

"Cain made the same answer," remarked Pierre de l'Hospital. "However, as you solemnly deny these charges, we must question Henriet and Pontou."

"Henriet! Pontou!" cried the marshal, trembling. "Surely, *they* accuse me of nothing?"

"Not as yet; they have not been questioned. But they are about to be brought into court, and I do not think they will lie in the face of justice."

"I demand that my servants be brought not forward as witnesses against their master!" stormed the marshal, his brow wrinkling and his beard bristling blue upon his chin. "A master is above the gossiping tales of his servants."

"Do you think, Monsieur, your servants will accuse you?"

"I demand that I, a marshal of France, a baron of the duchy, should be sheltered from the slanders of small folk, whom I disown as my servants if they are untrue to me."

"Justice knows no small folk, and no great. We shall see what Henriet and Pontou have to say." Pierre de l'Hospital nodded meaningly toward the curtain concealing the rack. "There are means of gleaning the truth."

At a sign from the judge, guards led the Sire de Retz back to his prison.

In the corridor outside the court room the marshal passed Henriet and Pontou, escorted by *agents d'armes*. Henriet averted his eyes; but Pontou burst into tears at sight of his master.

De Retz held out his hand, which Pontou kissed affectionately. "Remeber all I have done for you, my children," said the marshal, "and be good and faithful servants." Again Pontou covered his hands with kisses; but Henriet shrank from him with a shudder.

In silence the two culprits were conducted to the bar of the court. Pierre de l'Hospital looked sharply from one to the other, then signed to the clerk to read the indictment which charged them as accomplices of the Sire de Retz. Never for an instant did the eyes of the president of the court leave the face of Henriet while the clerk droned out the charge.

Henriet was a sharp contrast to Pontou. Pontou's bullet head, short, thick neck and undershot jaw betokened a nature innately cruel and bestial; nothing but torture, carried past the limit of human endurance, would wring the truth from him.

Henriet, on the other hand, was as fragile and as prettily made as a girl. Slender and tall, with tapering, white fingers and blonde hair falling in loose curls about his ears, he looked anything but the criminal he was accused of being. His blue eyes, though set too close together, were mild and timid in expression, and the slope of his beardless chin bespoke a nature rather weak than wicked.

"What say ye, wretched men, guilty or not guilty?" asked Pierre de l'Hospital, still gazing fixedly at Henriet.

"Alas, *mon juge*," exclaimed Henriet, "I am even as you say! I shall tell all; for I have another master besides my poor master of Retz and I shall soon be with the heavenly one."

HE would have continued, had not a shout from Pontou interrupted him.

"*Messieurs les juges*," he cried, "my poor friend is touched in the head—he is mad! All he says is but the raving of a lunatic!"

"Ah, Pontou, out of thine own mouth hast thou convicted thyself," returned Pierre de l'Hospital. "For hadst thou not been concerned in deviltry thou wouldst not have feared thy friend's ravings.

"Proceed," he nodded to Henriet. "And see to it that thou speak'st but the truth."

But Henriet seemed to have lost the power of speech. Only incoherent murmurings came from his nervously working lips. At last he managed to gasp:

"*Monsieur le juge*, I can not speak the abominable words I have to utter while *that* is in my sight—" he pointed a trembling finger to the great crucifix suspended above the judges' bench.

Led by Pierre de l'Hospital, the court rose, and stood with bared heads while, amid a deathlike silence, the image of the Lord was veiled in black bunting.

Condensed, Henriet's testimony was as follows:

On graduating from the university of Angus, he had taken the situation of reader in the household of the Sire de Retz. From the first, the marshal had taken a liking to him, and soon made him his chamberlain and confidant.

When he had been in the household about six months the marshal decided to deed the castle of Chantonce to the duke of Brittany. The night preceding the morning the duke took possession, the marshal summoned Henriet, Pontou and one Petit Robin to his bed chamber. When all were assembled, de Retz compelled Henriet to kneel on the bare floor and take a solemn and horrible oath never to reveal what was about to be told him.

The oath taken, the Sire de Retz told them he was expecting the duke's officers to take over the chateau the following day, and, before that happened, there were certain "matters" which had to be disposed of. Pontou and Robin grinned knowingly at this, but Henriet was in the dark until the other two servants procured ropes and poles tipped with hooks. They then led the way to an old disused well. Giving Henriet a torch and one of the grappling hooks, they lowered him into the well, with instructions to pass up all he found there.

What was his horror to find the hole filled with bodies of children, long dead. Almost fainting from fright and horror, he had, nevertheless, proceeded with the task assigned him and before daybreak the well was emptied and the little bodies, all of them terribly mutilated, burned to ashes in a great bonfire the other two servitors built. He had counted thirty-six heads in the well, but more bodies than heads.

Following this horrifying experience, life went on as usual within the marshal's household for several months. De Retz was deeply religious, and attended daily masses in his private chapel, accompanied by his entire suite. But one day, just at dusk, the marshal summoned Henriet to a room in a remote tower, where a great fire was blazing on the hearth.

"Fetch me a child," his master ordered curtly.

Not daring to ask an explanation, Henriet went outside the castle, seized a little boy he found in a nearby road, and carried him to his lord.

"Kill it," the Sire de Retz bade him.

"Kill it?" the young secretary stammered. "How—"

"Dolt!" de Retz stamped his foot impatiently, at the same time drawing back his lips like a snarling beast. "Slit its throat!"

Henriet carried out the fiendish order while the marshal stood by and gloated at sight of the little one's death agonies.

THEN began a life of crime unspeakable for Henriet. Child after child he bore to his master, always with the same fatal result. Sometimes de Retz himself inflicted the death stroke; more often he stood by, watching his servants performing the deed. Lucky was the child whose life ended with one quick blow from knife or axe. Torture, slow and horrible, was the lot of the great majority of the little victims.

When one of these massacres was finished, and the poor infant finally dead, the marshal was invariably filled with remorse for the deed. He would toss, weeping and praying, on the bed, or recite fervent litanies on his knees—while his servants washed up the floor and incinerated the little victims in the great fireplace. An insupportable odor filled the room where these slaughters invariably took place; but the marshal inhaled it with keenest delight.

Henriet acknowledged he had seen no less than forty children done to death in this manner, and so good a description was he able to give of several that it was possible to identify them as children whose parents had testified to their loss.

Relating the case of two lads named Hamelin, babes of three and four years, respectively, he told how the older boy waited his turn, weeping and praying, while his little brother was slowly tortured to death.

"But this is incredible," exclaimed Pierre de l'Hospital, whose eyes dilated at the horrors of Henriet's revelations. "Only some of the caesars of Rome have been charged with such detestable crimes!"

"*Monsieur le juge,*" Henriet replied, "it was the acts of these very caesars my master desired to emulate. I used to read him the chronicles of Suronius and Tacitus. He never tired hearing them; but ever urged me to read more and more."

"How many children do you estimate the Sire de Retz and his servants killed?"

"The reckoning is long. I, for my own wretched part, confess to killing twelve with my own hand at my master's orders. And I have brought him more than three score. I know this devil's business had long gone on before I entered his service."

"Have you more to declare?" asked the president of the court, signing himself with the cross.

"Nay, *mon juge,* save to ask Pontou, my friend, to corroborate what I have said."

"Pontou," said Pierre de l'Hospital, turning his burning eyes on the other culprit, "I command you in the name of God and of justice to declare all you know."

The deep-graved lines about the older servant's mouth lengthened as his facial muscles tightened; but he kept silence.

"For those who will not speak there is the rack," the judge reminded him, signing to the torturers to make ready.

But Pontou, heartless murderer though he was, had still the virtue of loyalty to the hand that fed him. Not until the executioners had forced him on the rack, and the cold iron of the gyves bit into his wrists and ankles did he commence his confession. Then, as the head torturer laid his hand to the windlass which would tighten the ropes, dislocating the prisoner's knee and elbow joints, Pontou's confession began.

If he had maintained a stubborn silence in the face of torture, his volubility was great enough now. All that Henriet had told and more, he related, heaping description of crime after revolting crime before the court till Pierre de l'Hospital would hear no more.

"Enough!" exclaimed the judge, cutting short the prisoner's abhorrent tale. "Were a thousand men on trial before us, thou hast told enough to convict them all!"

Next day Gilles de Laval stood once more before his judges.

"What answer make you to the charges?" asked Pierre de l'Hospital.

"I am chamberlain and marshal to his venerated majesty, the King of France—" began the prisoner arrogantly.

"This is no affair of the king of France," thundered the judge, incensed at the criminal's affrontery. "Confess, or by Our Lady and Saint Denys, you go to the rack!"

Cowed, his iron nerve broken by the threat of torture, Gilles de Laval told such a story as no court, before or since ever listened to.

Shortly before his voluntary retirement from the royal court he had chanced upon a Latin book detailing the lives of the caesars. Tales of revolting cruelty, which would have sickened an ordinary man, thrilled him with the greatest pleasure. He resolved to imitate or surpass these monsters of antiquity. That very night he carried his resolve into execution by running his sword through a luckless waif he came upon in the streets of Paris.

But Paris was a great city, under the ever-watchful eye of the king's officers. His plans could not be carried out there in safety. So, as soon as he could wind up his affairs, he renounced his promising career as a courtier and submerged himself at his principal country seat. From the day he settled at Marchecoul his depredations on the childhood of the diocese of Nantes began. In less than seven years he had committed, personally, or by agent, more than eight hundred child-murders.

The confession finished, Gilles de Laval looked expectantly at his judges. He was a very great, a very powerful nobleman, yet the president of the court had shown himself fearless and impartial throughout the trial. Would they order his lands confiscated? Would they dare imprison him, grand signeur and favorite of the king though he was?

Pierre de l'Hospital, president of the court, glanced from left to right, where his associate justices sat. Each way he looked, his colleagues met his eyes steadily and nodded briefly, significantly.

Pierre de l'Hospital looked down upon the prisoner as though some loathsome reptile were coiled upon the pavement before him.

"*A mort!*" he said shortly. And at the words a bell high up in the tower of the hall of justice began to toli.

GILLES DE LAVAL fell back a pace, his jaw relaxing as he looked upon the stern-faced man who had pronounced the sentence.

"*A mort!*—to death!"

Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz, chamberlain and councillor to the King, cousin og John V. Duke of Brittany and Marshal of France, had been sentenced to die like a common felon.

"*A mort,*" he muttered, wonderingly, stunned by the two-word sentence. "To hang in shame between two criminals!"

"Our Lord so died, dear master," whispered Henriet, who, pale and tearful, had stood to receive his sentence.

The Sire de Retz turned on him with an animal snarl. His lips went back from his teeth and his beard showed blue in the half-light streaming through the court room windows.

"You—" he began, raising his clenched fists over his trembling servant. "You traitor, you—"

Two *agents d'armes* laid hands on him and led him from the justice hall.

Every effort was made to stay execution. John V. Duke of Brittany, was

not pleased that his cousin should die upon the gallows. Gold, lands, all the the mighty fortune of the mighty Sire de Retz, were offered the bishop of Nantes if only he would consent to have the sentence commuted. Churches would be endowed, countless masses should be said for the souls of the worthy poor, splendid abbeys should be built—

Next morning a procession of priests, monks and civil guards wound its way through Nantes to the meadow of Biesse on the further side of the river Loire.

Three men, hands bound to sides, irons clanking at their ankles, marched near its head.

The procession halted near a line of poplar trees, where three gibbets, the center one somewhat higher than its neighbors, had been erected.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication,"

chanted the choir.

The tallest of the three prisoners, elegantly dressed in white satin, mounted the rickety step-ladder standing beneath the center gallows. A masked executioner adjusted the noose about his neck, being careful not to disturb his pointed, blue-black beard or the creamy lace ruffles at his throat.

The other two condemned knelt in their chains beneath their respective gibbets.

"Be a brave soldier of our Lord, dear master!" they called.

A ruffle of drums, a swelling anew of the *de profundus* from the choir of monks. The tall stool was struck from under him, and the body of Gilles de Laval swayed grotesquely in mid-air above the fire of brushwood and pitch the executioner lighted under it.

From the crowd came six veiled women and six barefooted Carmelite friars, carrying an ornate coffin. The body of Gilles de Retz was cut down, scarcely scorched, and carried toward the Carmelite church of Our Lady.

Two more high stools crashed to earth, two more bodies dangled at ropes' ends, two more fires roared beneath the gallows. But no coffin was brought forward for Henriet and Pontou. Their bodies crisped to ashes, borne away by the autumn breezes among the poplars of the Loire and the meadow of Biesse, while, in the Carmelite church of Our Lady, a mighty choir of monks chanted the responses of a solemn high mass of requiem above the remains of Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz, chamberlain and courtier to the king, marshal of France and—Bluebeard, the greatest criminal ever tried before a court of justice.

[Note: From the peculiarities of his case, as related by his servants and himself, there can be no doubt that Gilles de Laval, like the famous "Jack the Ripper," of London, was a victim of that form of insanity known to modern psychiatrists as algolagnia. See A. A. Brill, Psychoanalysis; Wharton & Stille, Medical Jurisprudence; Church & Peterson, Nervous Diseases and Insanity. But his insanity was not such as would entitle him to escape legal execution, either under the common or civil law, since, by his own confession, he knew the unlawfulness of his acts, and was clearly able to distinguish between right and wrong, as his fits of remorse showed. See Clark, or any standard text book on Criminal Law.—Seabury Quinn.]

This is the First of a Series of Articles Written for WEIRD TALES by Seabury Quinn. The Second Will Appear in the November Issue

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Weird Snake Dance of Hopis May Be Tabooed

THE annual snake dance of the Hopi Indians of Arizona is probably one of the most weird ceremonials, interwoven with traditions and superstitions of the past, that has survived to the present day.

It was observed by these aborigines of the southwest centuries before the advent of the paleface on this continent and has been continued by them in spite of hundreds of years of contact with civilization.

The Hopis were once a great and powerful nation. Today they number approximately a thousand souls, yet this pitifully small remnant of a one-time numerous people has never failed to stage the unique spectacle which annually attracts visitors from all parts of the world.

The dance is said to be a prayer for rain, intended for the great Manitou who supposedly controls the vast heavenly and subterranean reservoirs, beseeching him to release the waters so that springs may flow freely and streams may fill to irrigate the corn lands. Rattlesnakes and other venomous reptiles are carried, wriggling, squirming and hissing, suspended from the mouths of the half-naked dancers. Though many of the participants are bitten during each ceremonial, it is stated that no Hopi ever dies from the effects of the poison.

Authorities have intimated that if the Hopis do not discontinue the dance of their own accord the government may order it stopped, so it is possible that this year's ceremony may be the last.

A Fantastic Tale by the Author of "The Snake Fiend"

AN ADVENTURE IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION

By FARNSWORTH WRIGHT

THE thought of meteors terrifies me. They have a disagreeable habit of coming down and killing people at the most inopportune times. That is why I was so startled when I saw a large object hurtling toward me out of the sky, as I was walking along the lake front recently in my city of Chicago.

I shivered. Was this the end? I began to say my prayers. To my astonishment, the onrushing missile struck the grass beside me without the slightest jar.

I gasped.

Thousands of singular objects began to detach themselves. They bounded from the mass, and suddenly increased in size from one inch to three feet in diameter. They were entirely round, and covered with teeth. On each tooth were ten ears, constantly in motion. Each ear carried a quizzical eye.

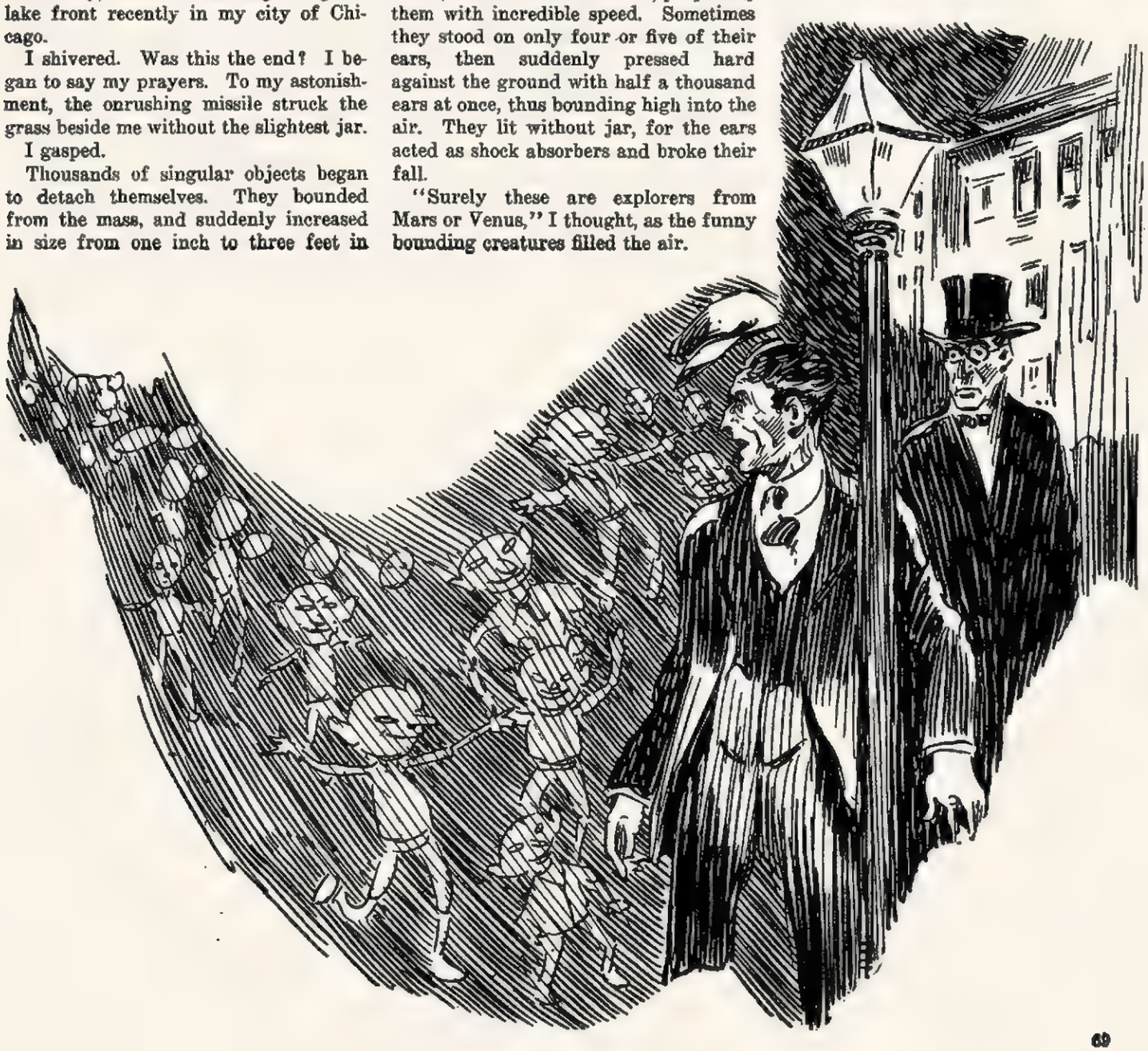
The dwarfish creatures rolled rapidly on the ground, the ears serving as legs, hands, tentacles and what not, propelling them with incredible speed. Sometimes they stood on only four or five of their ears, then suddenly pressed hard against the ground with half a thousand ears at once, thus bounding high into the air. They lit without jar, for the ears acted as shock absorbers and broke their fall.

"Surely these are explorers from Mars or Venus," I thought, as the funny bounding creatures filled the air.

"You are wrong. They are Jupiterians," said a voice beside me.

I recognized the voice. It was Professor Nutt. You probably know him.

"Ahem," he said. "Ahem, ahem!" And once more he repeated, "Ahem!"



"Interesting, if true," I remarked. "And what might Jupiterians be?"

"They might be men, but they're not," he snapped. "They are people from the planet Jupiter. Out of your ignorance you though they might be Martians or Venusians, but you are wrong, for Mars and Venus have people of three dimensions, like ourselves. Jupiterians are entirely different. There are six hundred thousand of them in this Jupiterian airship."

I was so overjoyed at finding someone who could tell me about them, that I didn't think to ask him how he knew all these startling facts.

"Where is the airship you speak of?" I asked.

"There it is," he answered, rather grandiloquently, and pointed to an empty spot on the grass.

I looked carefully, and made out a vast, transparent globe, apparently of glass, which was rapidly becoming visible because of the Chicago dust that was settling upon it. I approached, and touched it with my hand. It gave forth a metallic ring.

"Aha," laughed the professor. "You thought it was glass, but it is made of Jupiterian steel. Look out!"

I sprang back at his warning, and the last hundred thousand leapt out of the globe, passing right through the transparent metal of which it was composed.

"Nom de mademoiselle!" I exclaimed, in astonishment. This was a swear word I had learned in France when I was in the army.

"Nom de mademoiselle!" I repeated, for I liked to show off my knowledge of the language. "How can they pass through the glass without breaking it?"

"Through the Jupiterian steel, you mean," said Professor Nutt, severely. "I told you before that it is not glass. Jupiterian steel has four dimensions, and they pass through the fourth dimension. That is why you can't see the metal, for your eyes are only three-dimensional."

"Are the Jupiterian people four-dimensional?" I asked, awed.

"Certainly," said Nutt, rather irritably.

"Then how is it that I can see them?" I exclaimed triumphantly.

"You see only three of their four dimensions," he replied. "The other one is inside."

I turned to look again at the Jupiterians, who now covered the whole waterfront. One of them sprang lightly, fifty feet into the air, extended a hundred ears like tentacles, and seized an English sparrow. He crushed the sparrow with some score or more of his teeth, which, as I have said, covered his whole body. In less than a minute the poor bird was chewed to pieces. I looked closer, and saw that the Jupiterian had no mouth.

"Nom de mademoiselle!" I exclaimed, for the third time. "How can it get the bird into its stomach?"

"Through the fourth dimension," said Professor Nutt.

It was true. The chewed-up pieces of the bird were suddenly tossed into the air, and the Jupiterian sprang lightly after them. In mid-air he turned inside out, caught the pieces of the bird in his stomach, and lit on the grass again right side up with care.

"Did you see that?" I exclaimed, in a hushed voice. "Why can't I turn inside out that way?"

"Because you are not four-dimensional," replied the professor, a trace of annoyance in his voice. "It is a beautiful thing to have four dimensions," he rhapsodized. "Your Jupiterian is your only true intellectual, for he alone can truly reflect. He turns his gaze in upon himself."

"And sees what he had for breakfast?" I gasped. "And what his neighbors had, too?"

"Your questions are childish," said the professor, wearily. "A Jupiterian, of course, can look into the soul of things, and see what his neighbors had for breakfast, as you so vulgarly express it. But Jupiterians turn their thoughts to higher things."

The creatures now surrounded me, their ears turned inwards, as if they were supplicating.

"What do they want?" I asked the professor.

"They want something to drink," he replied. "They are pointing their ears toward their stomachs to show that they are thirsty."

"Oh," I said, and pointed toward the lake. "There is the fresh, cool water of the lake, if they are thirsty."

"Don't be fantastic," said Professor Nutt. "It isn't water they want."

He fixed his stern, pitiless gaze on my hip pocket. I turned pale, for it was my last pint. But I had to submit. If you have ever had Professor Nutt's cold, accusing eyes on you, you will know just how I felt.

I drew the flask from my pocket, and handed it to the chief Jupiterian, who waggled his ears in joy. Immediately there was pandemonium, if you know what I mean. Ten thousand times ten thousand ears seized the cork, and pulled it out with a resounding pop. One thirsty Jupiterian passed right through the glass into the bottle in his eagerness to get at the contents, and nearly drowned for his pains.

"You see how useful it is to be four-dimensional," remarked the professor. "You could get into any cellar in the world by merely passing through the walls. And into any beer-keg in the same way."

"But," I argued, "how did this—this insect get through the glass into the whisky bottle? Glass has only three dimensions, like everything else in this world."

"Don't call him an insect!" Nutt sharply reprimanded me. "He is a Jupiterian, and as such he is infinitely superior to you and me. He passed through the glass because he is four-dimensional, even though the glass isn't. If you had four dimensions, you could untie any knot by merely passing it through itself. You could turn inside out, or pass through yourself until your right hand became your left hand, and change into your own image as you see it in the looking-glass."

"Nom de mademoiselle!" I exclaimed, for the fourth time.

A distant noise of barking was borne to my ears by the breeze. All the dogs in the city seemed to have gone wild.

"They are disturbed by the talking of the Jupiterians," explained the professor. "It is too high-pitched for clod-hopper human ears to hear, unless they have an unusual range, but the dogs can hear it plainly."

I listened, and finally made out a very shrill humming, higher than any sound I had ever heard before in my life, and infinitely sweet and piercing.

"Ah, I am hearing four-dimensional sounds," I thought, aloud.

"Wrong, as usual," exacerbated the professor, with much heat. "Sound has no dimensions. It proceeds in waves, and bends back upon itself until it meets itself at an infinite distance from the starting point. There are three reasons why you can't hear the music of the spheres: first, because it is bent away from the earth by the force of gravity as it passes the sun; second, because your ears are not attuned to so shrill a sound; and third, because there *is* no music of the spheres. The first two reasons are really unnecessary, in the light of the third; but a scientific mind such as mine is not content with one reason when three can be adduced just as easily."

"Shades of Sir Oliver Lodge!" I ejaculated.

"Sir Oliver is alive," the professor corrected me. "A man does not become a shade until after his death. Then he

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MASTERPIECES OF WEIRD FICTION

The Pit and the Pendulum

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

I WAS sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of *revolution*—perhaps from its association in fancy with the burr of a millwheel. This only for a brief period; for presently I heard no more. Yet, for a while, I saw; but with how terrible an exaggeration! I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white—whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words—and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness—of immoveable resolution—of stern contempt of human torture. I saw that the decrees of what to me was Fate, were still issuing from those lips. I saw them writhe with a deadly locution. I saw them fashion the syllables of my name; and I shuddered because no sound succeeded. I saw, too, for a few moments of delirious horror, the soft and nearly imperceptible waving of the sable draperies which enwrapped the walls of the apartment. And then my vision fell upon the seven tall candles upon the table. At first they wore the aspect of charity, and seemed white slender angels who would save me; but then, all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit, and I felt every fibre in my frame thrill as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery, while the angel forms became meaningless spectres, with heads of flame, and I saw that from them there would be no help. And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave. The thought came gently and stealthily, and it seemed long before it attained full appreciation; but just as my spirt came at length properly to feel and entertain it, the figures of the judges vanished, as if magically, from before me; the tall candles sank into nothingness; their flames went out utterly; the blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, and night were the universe.

I had swooned; but still will not say that all of consciousness was lost. What of it there remained I will not attempt to define, or even to describe; yet all was not lost. In the deepest slumber—no! In delirium—no! In a swoon—no! In death—no! even in the grave all *is not* lost. Else there is no immortality for man. Arousing from the most profound of slumbers, we break the gossamer web of *some* dream. Yet in a second afterward, (so frail may that web have been) we remember not that we have dreamed. In the return to life from the swoon there are two stages; first, that of the sense of mental or spiritual; secondly, that of the sense of physical, existence. It seems probable that if, upon reaching the second stage, we could recall the impressions of the first, we should find these impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond. And that gulf is—what? How at least shall we distinguish its shadows from those of the tomb? But if the impressions of what I have termed the first stage, are not, at will, recalled, yet after long interval, do they not come unbidden, while we marvel whence they come? He who has never swooned, is not he who finds strange palaces and wildly familiar faces in coals that glow; is not he who beholds floating in mid-air the sad visions that the many may not view; is not he who ponders over the perfume of some novel flower—is not he whose brain grows bewildered with the meaning of some musical cadence which has never before arrested his attention.

Amid frequent and thoughful endeavors to remember; amid earnest struggles to regather some token of the state of seeming nothingness into which my soul had lapsed, there have been moments, when I have dreamed of success; there have been brief, very brief periods when I have conjured up remembrances which the lucid reason of a later epoch assures me could have had reference only to that condition of seeming unconsciousness. These shadows of memory tell, indistinctly, of tall figures that lifted and bore me in silence down—down—still down—till a hideous dizziness oppressed me at the mere idea of the interminableness of the descent. They tell also of a vague horror at my heart, on account of that heart's unnatural stillness. Then comes a sense of sudden motionlessness throughout all things; as if those who bore me (a ghastly train!) had outrun in their descent, the limits of the limitless, and paused from the wearisomeness of their toil. After this I call to mind flatness and dampness; and that all is *madness*—the madness of a memory which busies itself among forbidden things.

Very suddenly there came back to my soul motion and sound—the tumultuous motion of the heart, and, in my ears, the sound of its beating. Then a pause in which all is blank. Then again sound, and motion, and touch—a tingling sensation pervading my frame. Then the mere consciousness of existence, without thought—a condition which lasted long. Then, very suddenly, *thought*, and shuddering terror, and earnest endeavor to comprehend my true state. Then a strong desire to lapse into insensibility. Then a rushing revival of soul and a successful effort to move. And now a full memory of the trial, of the judges, of the sable draperies, of the sentence, of the sickness, of the swoon. Then entire forgetfulness of all that followed; of all that a later day and much earnestness of endeavor have enabled me vaguely to recall.

So far, I had not opened my eyes. I felt that I lay upon my back, unbound. I reached out my hand, and it fell heavily upon something damp and hard. There I suffered it to remain for many minutes, while I strove to imagine where and *what* I could be. I longed, yet dared not to employ my vision. I dreaded the first glance at objects around me. It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see. At length, with a wild desperation at heart, I quickly unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I struggled for breath. The intensity of the darkness seemed to oppress and stifle me. The atmosphere was intolerably close. I still lay quietly, and made effort to exercise my reason. I brought to mind the inquisitorial proceedings, and attempted from that point to deduce my real condition. The sentence had passed; and it appeared to me that a very long interval of time had since elapsed. Yet not for a moment did I suppose myself actually dead. Such a supposition, notwithstanding what we read in fiction, is altogether inconsistent with real existence—but where and in what state was I? The condemned to death, I knew, perished usually at the *autos-da-fe*, and one of these had been held on the very night of the day of my trial. Had I been remanded to my dungeon, to await the next sacrifice, which would not take place for many months? This I at once saw could not be. Victims had been in immediate demand. Moreover, my dungeon, as well as all the condemned cells at Toledo, had stone floors, and light was not altogether excluded.

A fearful idea now suddenly drove the blood in torrents upon my heart, and for a brief period, I once more relapsed into insensibility. Upon recovering, I at once started to my feet, trembling convulsively in every fibre. I thrust my arms wildly above and around me in all directions. I felt nothing; yet dreaded to move a step, lest I should be impeded by the walls of the *tomb*. Perspiration burst from every pore and stood in cold big beads upon my forehead. The agony of suspense grew at length intolerable, and I cautiously moved forward, with my arms extended, and my eyes straining from their sockets, in the hope of catching some faint ray of light. I proceeded for many paces; but still all was blackness and vacancy. I breathed more freely. It seemed evident that mine was not, at least, the most hideous of fates.

And now, as I still continued to step cautiously onward, there came thronging upon my recollection a thousand vague rumors of the horrors of Toledo. Of the dungeons there had been strange things narrated—fables I had always deemed them—but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in a whisper. Was I left to perish of starvation in the subterranean world of darkness; or what fate, perhaps even more fearful, awaited me? That the result would be death, and a death of more than customary bitterness, I knew too well the character of my judges to doubt. The mode and the hour were all that occupied or distracted me.

My outstretched hands at length encountered some solid obstruction. It was a wall, seemingly of stone masonry—very smooth, slimy, and cold. I followed it up, stepping with all the careful distrust with which certain antique narratives had inspired me. This process, how-

ever, afforded me no means of ascertaining the dimensions of my dungeon; as I might make its circuit, and return to the point whence I set out, without being aware of the fact; so perfectly uniform seemed the wall. I therefore sought the knife which had been in my pocket, when led into the inquisitorial chamber; but it was gone; my clothes had been exchanged for a wrapper of coarse serge. I had thought of forcing the blade in some minute crevice of the masonry, so as to identify my point of departure. The difficulty, nevertheless, was but trivial; although, in the disorder of my fancy, it seemed at first insuperable. I tore a part of the hem from the robe and placed the fragment at full length, and at right angles to the wall. In groping my way around the prison I could not fail to encounter this rag upon completing the circuit. So, at least I thought: but I had not counted upon the extent of the dungeon, or upon my own weakness. The ground was moist and slippery. I staggered onward for some time, when I stumbled and fell. My excessive fatigue induced me to remain prostrate; and sleep soon overtook me as I lay.

Upon awakening, and stretching forth an arm, I found beside me a loaf and pitcher with water. I was too much exhausted to reflect upon this circumstance, but ate and drank with avidity. Shortly afterward, I resumed my tour around the prison, and with much toil, came at last upon the fragment of the serge. Up to the period when I fell I had counted fifty-two paces, and upon resuming my walk, I counted forty-eight more—when I arrived at the rag. There were in all, then, a hundred paces; and, admitting two paces to the yard, I presumed the dungeon to be fifty yards in circuit. I had met, however, with many angles in the wall, and thus I could form no guess at the shape of the vault; for vault I could not help supposing it to be.

I had little object—certainly no hope—in these researches; but a vague curiosity prompted me to continue them. Quitting the wall, I resolved to cross the area of the enclosure. At first I proceeded with extreme caution, for the floor, although seemingly of solid material, was treacherous with slime. At length, however, I took courage, and did not hesitate to step firmly; endeavoring to cross in as direct a line as possible. I had advanced some ten or twelve paces in this manner, when the remnant of the torn hem of my robe became entangled between my legs. I stepped on it, and fell violently on my face.

In the confusion attending my fall, I did not immediately apprehend a somewhat startling circumstance, which yet, in a few seconds afterwards, and while I still lay prostrate, arrested my attention. It was this—my chin rested upon the floor of the prison, but my lips and the upper portion of my head, although seemingly at a less elevation than the chin, touched nothing. At the same time my forehead seemed bathed in a clammy vapor, and the peculiar smell of decayed fungus arose to my nostrils. I put forward my arm, and shuddered to find that I had fallen at the very brink of a circular pit, whose extent, of course, I had no means of ascertaining at the moment. Groping about the masonry just below the margin, I succeeded in dislodging a small fragment, and let it fall into the abyss. For many seconds I hearkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm in its descent; at length there was a sullen plunge into water, succeeded by loud echoes. At the same moment there came a sound resembling the quick opening, and as rapid closing of a door overhead, while a faint gleam of light flashed suddenly through the gloom, and as suddenly faded away.

I saw clearly the doom which had been prepared for me, and congratulated myself upon the timely accident by which I had escaped. Another step before my fall, and the world had seen me no more. And the death just avoided, was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales respecting the Inquisition. To the victims of its tyranny, there was the choice of death with it direst physical agonies, or death with its most hideous moral horrors. I had been reserved for the latter. By long suffering my nerves had been unstrung, until I trembled at the sound of my own voice, and had become in every respect a fitting subject for the species of torture which awaited me.

Shaking in every limb, I groped my way back to the wall; resolving there to perish rather than risk the terrors of the wells, of which my imagination now pictured many in various positions about the dungeon. In other conditions of mind I might have had courage to end my misery at once by a plunge into one of these abysses; but now I was the veriest of cowards. Neither could I forget what I had read of these pits—that the *sudden* extinction of life formed no part of their most horrible plan.

Agitation of spirit kept me awake for many long hours; but at length again slumbered. Upon arousing, I found by my side, as before, a loaf and a pitcher of water. A burning thirst consumed me, and I emptied the vessel at a draught. It must have been drugged; for scarcely had I drunk, before I became irresistibly drowsy. A deep sleep fell upon me—a sleep like that of death. How long it lasted of course, I know not; but when, once again, I unclosed my eyes, the objects around me were visible. By a wild sulphurous lustre, the origin of which I could not at first determine, I was enabled to see the extent and aspect of the prison.

In its size I had been greatly mistaken. The whole circuit of its walls did not exceed twenty-five yards. For some minutes this fact occasioned me a world of vain trouble; vain indeed! for what could be of less importance, under the terrible circumstances which environed me, than the mere dimensions of my dungeon? But my soul took a wild interest in trifles, and I busied myself in endeavors to account for the error I had committed in my measurement. The truth at length flashed upon me. In my first attempt at exploration I had counted fifty-two paces, up to the period when I fell; I must then have been within a pace or two of the fragments of serge; in fact, I had nearly performed the circuit of the vault. I then slept, and upon awaking, I must have returned upon my steps—thus supposing the circuit nearly double what it actually was. My confusion of mind prevented me from observing that I began my tour with the wall to the left, and ended it with the wall to the right.

I had been deceived, too, in respect to the shape of the enclosure. In feeling my way I had found many angles, and thus deduced an idea of great irregularity; so potent is the effect of total darkness upon one arousing from lethargy or sleep! The angles were simply those of a few slight depressions, or niches, at odd intervals. The general shape of the prison was square. What I had taken for masonry seemed now to be iron, or some other metal, in huge plates, whose sutures or joints occasioned the depression. The entire surface of this metallic enclosure was rudely daubed in all the hideous and repulsive devices to which the charnel superstitions of the monks has given rise. The figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other more really fearful images, overspread and disfigured the walls. I observed that the outlines of these monstrosities were sufficiently distinct, but that the colors seemed faded and blurred, as if from the effects of a damp atmosphere. I now noticed the floor, too, which was of stone. In the centre yawned the circular pit from whose jaws I had escaped; but it was the only one in the dungeon.

All this I saw indistinctly and by much effort: for my personal condition had been greatly changed during slumber. I now lay upon my back, and at full length, on a species of low framework of wood. To this I was securely bound by a long strap resembling a surcingle. It passed in many convolutions about my limbs and body, leaving at liberty only my head, and my left arm to such extent that I could, by dint of much exertion, supply myself with food from an earthen dish which lay by my side on the floor. I saw, to my horror, that the pitcher had been removed. I say to my horror; for I was consumed with intolerable thirst. This thirst it appeared to be the design of my persecutors to stimulate: for the food in the dish was meat pungently seasoned.

Looking upward I surveyed the ceiling of my prison. It was some thirty or forty feet overhead, and constructed much as the side walls. In one of its panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum such as we see on antique clocks. There was something, however, in the appearance of this machine which caused me to regard it more attentively. While I gazed directly upward at it (for its position was immediately over my own) I fancied that I saw it in motion. In an instant afterward the fancy was confirmed. Its sweep was brief, and of course slow. I watched it for some minutes, somewhat in fear, but more in wonder. Wearied at length with observing its dull movement, I turned my eyes upon the other objects in the cell.

A slight noise attracted my notice, and, looking to the floor, I saw several enormous rats traversing it. They had issued from the wall which lay just within view to my right. Even then, while I gazed, they came up in troops, hurriedly, with ravenous eyes, allured by the scent of the meat. From this it required much effort and attention to scare them away.

It might have been half an hour, perhaps even an hour, (for I could take but imperfect note of time) before I again cast my eyes upward. What I then saw confounded and amazed me. The sweep of the pendulum had increased in extent by nearly a yard. As a natural consequence, its velocity was also much greater. But what mainly disturbed me was the idea that it had perceptibly *descended*. I now observed—with what horror it is needless to say—that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel, about a foot in length from horn to horn; the horns upward, and the under edge evidently as keen as that of a razor. Like a razor also, it seemed massy and heavy, tapering from the edge into a solid and broad structure above. It was appended to a weighty rod of brass, and the whole *hissed* as it swung through the air.

I could no longer doubt the doom prepared for me by monkish ingenuity in torture. My cognizance of the pit had become known to the inquisitorial agents—*the pit* whose horrors had been destined for so bold a recusant as myself—*the pit*, typical of hell, and regarded by rumor as the Ultima Thule of all their punishments.

The plunge into this pit I had avoided by the merest of accidents, and I knew that surprise, or entrapment into torment, formed an important portion of all the grotesquerie of these dungeon deaths. Having failed to fall, it was no part of the demon plan to hurl me into the abyss; and thus (there being no alternative) a different and a milder destruction awaited me. Milder! I half smiled in my agony as I thought of such application of such a term.

What boots it to tell of the long, long hours of horror more than moral, during which I counted the rushing vibrations of the steel! Inch by inch—line by line—with a descent only appreciable at intervals that seemed ages—down and still down it came! Days passed—it might have been that many days passed—ere it swept so closely over me as to fan me with its acrid breath. The odor of the sharp steel forced itself into my nostrils. I prayed—I wearied heaven with my prayer for its more speedy descent. I grew frantically mad, and struggled to force myself upward against the sweep of the fearful scimitar. And then I fell suddenly calm, and lay smiling at the glittering death, as a child at some rare bauble.

There was another interval of utter insensibility; it was brief; for, upon again lapsing into life there had been no perceptible descent in the pendulum. But it might have been long; for I knew there were demons who took note of my swoon, and who could have arrested the vibration at pleasure. Upon my recovery, too, I felt very—oh, inexpressibly sick and weak, as if through long inanition. Even amid the agonies of that period, the human nature craved food. With painful effort I outstretched my left arm as far as my bonds permitted, and took possession of the small remnant which had been spared me by the rats. As I put a portion of it within my lips, there rushed to my mind a half formed thought of joy—of hope. Yet what business had *I* with hope? It was, as I say, a half formed thought—man has many such which are never completed. I felt that it was of joy—of hope; but I felt also that it had perished in its formation. In vain I struggled to perfect—to regain it. Long suffering had nearly annihilated all my ordinary powers of mind. I was an imbecile—an idiot.

The vibration of the pendulum was at right angles to my length. I saw that the crescent was designed to cross the region of the heart. It would fray the serge of my robe—it would return and repeat its operations—again—and again. Notwithstanding its terrifically wide sweep (some thirty feet or more) and the hissing vigor of its descent, sufficient to sunder these very walls of iron, still the fraying of my robe would be all that, for several minutes, it would accomplish. And at this thought I paused. I dared not go farther than this reflection. I dwelt upon it with a pertinacity of attention—as if, in so dwelling, I could arrest *here* the descent of the steel. I forced myself to ponder upon the sound of the crescent as it should pass across the garment—upon the peculiar thrilling sensation which the friction of cloth produces on the nerves. I pondered upon all this frivolity until my teeth were on edge.

Down—steadily down it crept. I took a frenzied pleasure in contrasting its downward with its lateral velocity. To the right—to the left—far and wide—with the shriek of a damned spirit; to my heart with the stealthy pace of the tiger! I alternately laughed and howled as the one or the other idea grew predominant.

Down—certainly, relentlessly down! It vibrated within three inches of my bosom! I struggled violently, furiously, to free my left arm. This was free only from the elbow to the hand. I could reach the latter, from the platter beside me, to my mouth, with great effort, but no farther. Could I have broken the fastenings above the elbow, I would have seized and attempted to arrest the pendulum. I might as well have attempted to arrest an avalanche!

Down—still unceasingly—still inevitably down! I gasped and struggled at each vibration. I shrunk convulsively at its every sweep. My eyes followed its outward or upward whirls with the eagerness of the most unmeaning despair; they closed themselves spasmodically at the descent, although death would have been a relief, oh! how unspeakable! Still I quivered in every nerve to think how slight a sinking of the machinery would precipitate that keen, glistening axe upon my bosom. It was *hope* that prompted the nerve to quiver—the frame to shrink. It was *hope*—the hope that triumphs on the rack—that whispers to the death-condemned even in the dungeons of the Inquisition.

I saw that some ten or twelve vibrations would bring the steel in actual contact with my robe, and with this observation there suddenly came over my spirit all the keen, collected calmness of despair. For the first time during many hours—or perhaps days— I *thought*. It now occurred to me that the bandage, or surcingle, which enveloped me, was *unique*. I was tied by no separate cord. The first stroke of the razor-like crescent athwart any portion of the band, would so detach it that it might be unwound from my person by means of my left hand. But how fearful, in that case, the proximity of the steel! The result of the slightest struggle how deadly! Was it likely, moreover, that the minions of the torturer had not foreseen and provided for this possibility! Was it probable that the bandage crossed my bosom in the track of the pendulum? Dreading to find my faint, and, as it seemed, my last hope frustrated, I so far elevated my head as to obtain a distinct view of my breast. The surcingle enveloped my limbs and body close in all directions—*save in the path of the destroying crescent*.

Scarcely had I dropped my head back into its original position, when there flashed upon my mind what I cannot better describe than as the unformed half of that idea of deliverance to which I have previously alluded, and of which a moiety only floated indeterminately through my brain when I raised food to my burning lips. The whole thought was now present— feeble, scarcely sane, scarcely definite—but still entire. I proceeded at once, with the nervous energy of despair, to attempt its execution.

For many hours the immediate vicinity of the low framework upon which I lay, had been literally swarming with rats. They were wild, bold, ravenous; their red eyes glaring upon me as if they waited but for motionlessness on my part to make me their prey. "To what food," I thought, "have they been accustomed in the well?"

They had devoured, in spite of all my efforts to prevent them, all but a small remnant of the contents of the dish. I had fallen into an habitual see-saw, or wave of the hand about the platter; and, at length, the unconscious uniformity of the movement deprived it of effect. In their voracity the vermin frequently fastened their sharp fangs into my fingers. With the particles of the oily and spicy viand which now remained, I thoroughly rubbed the bandage wherever I could reach it; then, raising my hand from the floor, I lay breathlessly still.

At first the ravenous animals were startled and terrified at the change—at the cessation of movement. They shrank alarmedly back; many sought the well. But this was only for a moment. I had not counted in vain upon their voracity. Observing that I remained without motion, one or two of the boldest leaped upon the frame-work, and smelt at the surcingle. This seemed the signal for a general rush. Forth from the well they hurried in fresh troops. They clung to the wood—they overran it, and leaped in hundreds upon my person. The measured movement of the pendulum disturbed them not at all. Avoiding its strokes they busied themselves with the anointed bandage. They pressed—they swarmed upon me in ever accumulating heaps. They writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my own; I was half stifled by their thronging pressure; disgust, for which the world has no name, swelled my bosom, and chilled, with a heavy clamminess, my heart. Yet one minute, and I felt that the struggle would be over. Plainly I perceived the loosening of the bandage. I knew that in more than one place it must be already severed. With a more than human resolution I lay *still*.

Nor had I erred in my calculations—nor had I endured in vain. I at length felt that I was *free*. The surcingle hung in ribands from my body. But the stroke of the pendulum already pressed upon my bosom. It had divided the serge of the robe. It had cut through the linen beneath. Twice again it swung, and a sharp sense of pain shot through every nerve. But the moment of escape had arrived. At a wave of my hand my deliverers hurried tumultuously away. With a steady movement—cautious, sidelong, shrinking, and slow—I slid from the embrace of the bandage and beyond the reach of the scimitar. For the moment, at least, *I was free*.

Free!—and in the grasp of the Inquisition! I had scarcely stepped from my wooden bed of horror upon the stone floor of the prison, when the motion of the hellish machine ceased and I beheld it drawn up, by some invisible force, through the ceiling. This was a lesson which I took desperately to heart. My every motion was undoubtedly watched. Free!—I had but escaped death in one form of agony, to be delivered unto worse than death in some other. With that thought I rolled my eyes nervously around on the barriers of iron that hemmed me in. Something unusual—some change which at first I could not appreciate distinctly—it was obvious, had taken place in the apartment. For many minutes in a dreamy and trembling abstraction, I busied myself in vain, unconnected conjecture. During this period, I became aware, for the first time, of the origin of the sulphurous light which illuminated the cell. It proceeded from a fissure, about half an inch in width, extending entirely around the prison at the base of the walls, which thus appeared, and were, completely separated from the floor. I endeavored, but of course in vain, to look through the aperture.

As I arose from the attempt, the mystery of the alteration in the chamber broke at once upon my understanding. I had observed that, although the outlines of the figures upon the walls were sufficiently distinct, yet the colours seemed blurred and indefinite. These colors had now assumed, and were momentarily assuming, a startling and most intense brilliancy, that gave to the spectral and fiendish portraitures an aspect that might have thrilled even firmer nerves than my own. Demon eyes, of a wild and ghastly vivacity, glared upon me in a thousand directions, where none had been visible before, and gleamed with the lurid lustre of a fire that I could not force my imagination to regard as unreal.

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An Unexpected Thing Happened to Bennett Tierney

After the Storm

A Short Story

By SARAH HARBINE WEAVER

BENNETT TIERNEY did a queer thing. We were in his rooms on Central Park South, discussing Tom, Dick and Harriet when my gaze was arrested by a photograph on his desk.

It was the picture of a girl in decollete gown, with a rose fastened in the diaphanous draperies of her bodice—a girl of classic beauty. For the nonce, I forgot everything trying to recall where I had seen that vivid face.

When I had sauntered into Bennett's bachelor apartments, he had called my attention to the view from his windows. Now, he suddenly sprang to his feet and with a wide gesture cried:

"Look, McDonald, there goes a Cardinal—in that victoria!"

As I glanced down at a figure in ecclesiastical scarlet, Bennett strode quickly across the room. I turned in time to see him grasp the photograph which had piqued my interest and throw it into the drawer of his desk. Then he dropped into a chair where he sat motionless—his face a mask.

"What on earth—" I began, and stopped abruptly. One could as soon chuck President Coolidge under the chin or wink at General Pershing as assume liberties with Bennett Tierney. But why on earth, I wondered, did he want to get that picture out of my sight?

The incident brought to mind talk I had heard of Bennett's engagement to an out-of-town girl. But whether the match had materialized I never had heard. I was endeavoring to piece together odd fragments of gossip when Bennett brought me back to actualities.

"It's odd how you and I have drifted," he began. "Pals at Harvard—now almost strangers. You're still at 111 Broadway?"

"Oh, I'm there all right, although my clients don't seem aware of the fact. The population of Greater New York is over seven millions, yet, judging from the eager multitudes which flock to my door, Manhattan might be a desert

island. I'm dipping in real estate, and just now am on the lookout for a Long Island demesne for a weary plutocrat. Know of anything?"

Tierney's eyes narrowed as if he were seeing things far away. Then he laid a hand on my shoulder. "In all probability, I've the very place you're looking for. I've decided to sell Ravensnest—the old Tierney home."

It seemed to me that I was on the trail of a pretty commission and my attention was entirely unforced, as Tierney described his property on the North Shore of Long Island—over a hundred acres of gently rolling land, a thirty-room dwelling, a small lake, woodlands, et cetera.

"There have been a lot of places in that neighborhood broken into recently," said Tierney, "and I've been intending to go out and look things over. Suppose we drive out next Friday and slay two birds with a single pebble?"

It sounded good to me, so I accepted the offer with alacrity.

"There's no use in going about this thing half primed!" exclaimed Bennett, who appeared to me to be laboring under excitement, unwarranted by the facts in the case. "You admit, old chap," he continued, "that your safety deposit box isn't jammed with securities, while I freely confess that I'm utterly weary of this town. Find me a buyer for Ravensnest, and we'll go to South America and buy a ranch! What do you say?"

His enthusiasm infected me. New York is crammed with lawyers and the adventure beckoned. Moreover, I had finally come to the conclusion that Edith Noland cared for me only as a passing acquaintance. I had little to lose, much to gain, and Bennett's dark persuasive eyes were on me. I considered for the space of a moment.

"Done!" I shouted. "I'm with you."

"Good for you!" cried Bennett, extending his hand to bind the bargain.

"I'll not fail you," I returned seriously. "Old Grigsly will probably jump at the chance to get your place, but if he doesn't, Long Island real estate is in demand and there'll be another purchaser."

"You'll not regret your bargain. Will Scranton was in last week, chock-full of the opportunities down there. He's made a fortune in Paraguay, you know."

My ardor had waned somewhat when we parted a little later. Instead of going to my office, I took a northbound Madison Avenue car to the home of the girl I had decided never again to bother with my presence. Things were different now, and soon thousands of miles would stretch between us.

Edith Noland was in and greeted me in a heart-warming manner. Her big eyes stared reproachfully into mine as she said: "You've neglected me frightfully of late, Bobby McDonald."

"I thought you never wanted to see me again," I foundered hopelessly.

Her face, which, though sweet as a rose, was without the imperial pulchritude of the girl whose portrait Bennett had whisked from his desk, clouded instantly.

"I always want to see you," she whispered softly.

This was too much for my Scotch-Irish blood, and a moment later she was in my arms and I was babbling sentiment in her ear. Evidently, Edith thought I deserved a lecture, for she was soon telling me that I was very foolish to conclude that she cared anything for a person just because she went about with him some.

"And," she concluded, "much of the world's unhappiness is caused by the unjust suspicions and silly pride of folks. False judgments and egotism! Now, look at Bennett Tierney, deliberately making himself miserable."

What Edith meant by her remark about Bennett, I knew not, but the mere mention of his name paralyzed my fervor. Here was a maddening mix-up! Edith was dearer to me than the world, yet my hands were tied. Small wonder that when I left here I was fuming because I had abandoned a sure heaven for Bennett's chimera.

THOUGH the time we set for our rendezvous was two o'clock, it was almost four when Bennett hurried into my office. To my suggestion that we postpone the trip until we could make an earlier start, he retorted grimly that there was no time like the present.

We made haste to get away, but as we were crossing Blackwell's Island Bridge, Bennett remarked apprehensively:

"I don't like the feel of the air. Looks as if we're in for a ducking."

A glance at the shrouded heavens convinced me that he was probably weatherwise, but the matter was not to remain long in doubt. We had scarcely passed Kew Gardens when the storm was upon us. For several moments we whizzed along while flash followed flash and rumble succeeded rumble.

"There's no use in being reckless," said Bennett, after a deafening clap. "There's a road-house near here with something of a reputation for its cuisine. We'll turn in there, eat a leisurely dinner and see Ravensnest afterward. The storm's too thorough-going to last long."

The meal at the small hostelry was better than I had anticipated, but even the smothered duck failed to elicit a word of commendation from Tierney, who had grown unaccountably gloomy. Though thinner and more distinguished-looking than the man I had known at Harvard, he had not changed much physically. Yet I became convinced that, in some subtle way, not easily discerned or diagnosed, he was greatly altered. He seemed more serious, more sensitive, and, paradoxical as it may sound, more master of himself.

We had reached the cheese and coffee stage of our repast and the storm had celebrated its grand finale, when I, thinking of Edith Noland's sentient face, soft little hands, and the snatched kiss, ventured a remark which upset Bennett's composure.

"Bennett," I began sententiously, "I've seen quite a bit of life, and although I'll concede that but few marriages lead to unadulterated bliss, I've concluded that celibacy is a forlorn mistake. You ought to marry. Let's reconsider our South American project."

He put down his demi tasse with such haste that some of the coffee slopped over into the saucer.

"No!" he returned savagely, "and don't talk marriage to me either."

With oxen-headed stupidity, I was about to make some jovial retort, asking if he'd been stung or something of that sort, when the hurt look in Tierney's eyes arrested me. So I merely said that as the storm's hysterics seemed to be passed, we might as well conclude our journey.

Tierney leaned toward me, one arm flung out, a smile twisting his appealing face. "We'll start in a few minutes. As for my ever marrying—well, the fact is, I'm married already, and we've shaken hands on the ranch proposition."

With the dignity which was a part of him, he rose and led the way to the lounging-room. There we puffed our cigars for a time in silence until I again suggested our getting under way.

He looked at me quizzically as he replied: "I've lived most of my life at Ravensnest and I rather hate to think of parting with it. Going there with you tonight is bound to rouse from their perches a horde of recollections and make me as blue as Egypt's sky."

I knew how he felt and only said that I realized the hold such places make on one's affections, but that Ravensnest must be worth a fortune, tritely adding, probably from force of habit, that the

time to sell a thing was when somebody wanted it. I hoped Bennett would ultimately refuse to sell and thereby queer our South American project. Since we had made our mad contract, my law business had livened up amazingly. Besides, there was Edith Noland—

"Oh, I suppose you're right," he agreed wearily. And then as we stepped out on the porch, "Hello, it's growing dark."

It was, indeed, for, although the rain had ceased, clouds curtained the heavens and night had arrived prematurely. We stopped at a grocery store in the next village, Maple Valley, and bought matches and some candles.

"Now, I guess we can see the place—and perhaps, burn the house down in the bargain," announced Tierney.

A few moments later, the car stopped before an impressive entrance to the magnificent grounds of Ravensnest. A heavy steel chain barred the gateway.

"I'm sorry," said my host, "but we'll have to get out. I've a key to the house, but not to this contraption. We'll have to walk up."

We leaped over the chains and entered the park. I am not an expert at judging distances, but it must have been about a third of a mile before a turn in the driveway brought us directly in front of the regal old dwelling. It was highest in the pillared central part where there were three stories, for the wings on either side had but two floors and were rather low and extremely inviting.

As we approached the majestic facade, the moon, pirouetting with the clouds, suddenly lighted the mansion with a pale and fickle radiance. We paused for a moment under the lofty, silent trees, gazing at the house. Then the eerie brightness faded from the windows, and with a levity I did not feel, I turned to my companion.

"It's a wonderful old place, Bennett, wonderful! But it would be much more cheerful with a few dozen thirty-two candle power Mazdas distributed throughout its interior. A phonograph phonographing at full capacity, or ten or twenty young voices singing 'Nelly Kelly' would liven things up a bit."

"It does look lonesome," admitted Tierney, whose face in the moonlight, appeared as cheerful as a calla lily's.

"These old oaks and elms must be priceless," I went on, with simulated zest. "But it strikes me as abominably spooky, stealing in here in the night like two crooks. There aren't any ghosts, are there?"

Tierney smothered a sigh and pointed to a balcony over which wistaria hung and clung in waving, dark festoons. We left the front of the house and wandered around under the shadow of the right wing. All at once Tierney clutched my arm with a grip that hurt.

"Look!" he whispered hoarsely.

MY EYES followed his rapt gaze, and there under the drawn shade—an almost drawn shade, I should say—filtered a ribbon of light. My breath came quick, for the surprise of the thing got me.

Then I crept to the window with Tierney, and, standing on my toes, peered into the room. Instinctively, I drew back, for not eight feet away, was a man sitting by a table.

"*S-s-h-s-s-h!*" cautioned Bennett, as I bettered my position for another peep within.

My second glance was more prolonged and took in some details of the large, handsome apartment where the man sat. It was evidently a living-room or back parlor, with books in glassed cases, and, on the walls, covered pictures. There were three doors leading to it, so that it occurred to me immediately if Tierney guarded one entrance and I another, the man might escape through the third—or leap through a window. But it was the housebreaker himself who riveted my attention.

He was slouched in a leather chair, apparently reading. A student's lamp stood near him, while a large volume lay open on his knee. But even as we gazed, his eyes closed, his head dropped lower and lower and he appeared to doze. His face was turned slightly away from the window, but even so I could see that he was more blond than swart, of powerful build, a Viking in appearance.

Bennett pulled me away a few paces where we could consult without much danger of being overheard. We backed into some ivy on a *porte cochere* and got a drenching shower of raindrops down our necks.

"Have you a pistol?" whispered Tierney.

I half drew from my pocket the black handle of my 32-calibre revolver. "I've a hunter's license and never go to the country without a gun. And you?"

He held up his fists. "Only these, but I know how to use them."

I recalled Bennett's skill at wrestling and was not ill-pleased.

"We'd better go in the rear door and take him by surprise," he went on.

"Do you know him?"

"No, but as I told you there have been a number of robberies around here of late, terrorizing Maple Valley."

"Looks like we've found the robbers' lair," I hazarded in an all but inaudible voice.

Bennett drew me still further away.

"Robert," he said, "I got you into this, and it looks ugly. These people (for there are probably more than one) are at least housebreakers. The fellows who broke into Cushing's place last week were professionals— armed to the teeth. That sleeping giant is no Mellin's Food baby. If you say so, we'll drive back to Maple Valley for reinforcements—"

"Never!" I cried. "We've got the advantage of surprise on our side, and as for me, I'm for the attack and the adventure."

"Good," was Bennett's only comment, but he said it in a way to warm the blood.

As we passed the living-room windows, we paused to see whether the old fellow still slept. No, he was wide-awake, and had reason to be! A short man, wearing a mask, had strapped the Viking to his chair, and even as we watched, proceeded to gag him. A second man, also masked, who walked with a slight limp, kept him covered with a revolver.

In a flash I recalled a newspaper account of an escaped criminal, "Limping Larry," known to be on Long Island and described by the police as a hardened villain, who had taken more than one life.

"Smash the window with the barrel of your gun," whispered Bennett hoarsely, "and pick off the big fellow. Then, wing the other."

I smashed the window and fired at once. "Limping Larry"—for it was he—staggered forward on to his knees and crumpled up, firing his revolver as he hit the floor. The other, who was rifling the old man's pockets, jumped and ran. I fired after him twice, and it seemed to me that he wavered slightly as he went, but he didn't stop. We rushed around to the rear of the house to cut him off, but the advantage was on his side. We had just turned the corner of the house when the kitchen door was flung open, and he sprang out and went tearing along toward the dense shrubbery. My revolver spoke again, but in a trice he had disappeared.

I was about to pursue him, but Bennett stopped me. "He's headed for the grove. We'd never find him in a century. Better go back."

Suddenly, Bennett jerked my arm and uttered a stifled exclamation. "Look upstairs! What's that?"

Standing there among the bushes we could see lights gleaming from four upper windows. My blood was up.

"Some more of 'em!" I cried. "Let's creep in and nab 'em."

"All right. We'll take a look at the old man first and at the fellow you shot."

We stole noiselessly through the open back door and into a long corridor as black as Erebus. Piloted by Bennett, we tiptoed to the living-room. "Limping Larry" was sprawled in a heap where he had fallen. It took but a glance to see that a bullet in his heart had put an end to his evil career. The Viking was struggling to free himself from his cords. Tierney spoke coolly.

"We're going upstairs to see what's wrong. Then we'll be down and give you a chance to explain yourself."

A horrid, heaving, guttural sound issued from the old man's gagged mouth.

"Sorry," said Bennett tersely. "Can't take any chances with you now. This happens to be my house."

As we groped up the back stairs, two of the steps creaked, but, although we stood stock still for several minutes, nothing happened, so we concluded we had not been heard. The halls in the second story were dark, too. The shades were lowered and we dared not use our candles.

Suddenly, Bennett gave a sort of gasp and fell head first over something on the floor. My foot struck it about the same time and I shrank back, thinking I had run against a human body. In a trice Tierney was on his feet again, towing me along.

"That was a rug," he panted, "rolled up." And then he came to an abrupt standstill, bending toward me. "I'm going to open the door to the wing now. If we make any noise, they'll hear us."

"All right," I whispered.

Bennett slowly turned the knob and we pushed ahead. With infinite caution, we tiptoed to where a half-opened door emitted a broad belt of light and we gazed into the room.

Never, if I live a thousand years, shall I forget the picture stenciled on my vision.

Opposite us, in a four posted Colonial bed, lay a pallid, young woman. Her limbs showed straight beneath the thin covering; her hands rested together, loosely; heavy gold braids were arranged on either side of her exquisite, bloodless profile. I have played my part, not ignobly I hope, in hand-to-hand encounters, but I confess that for an instant, as I looked at that inanimate figure, my heart ceased to beat. Suddenly, Bennett lurched heavily against me, and when I saw his distorted countenance, I thought he must have gone mad. He was as white as a corpse and choking—actually choking in an effort to speak. Finally, the words came:

"She's dead!" he murmured.

"You don't need to tell me that," I retorted.

Tierney, pulling himself together, took a stumbling step forward.

Then a startled voice arrested us: "Colonel Rogers! Is it you?"

From an embrasure at the other end of the room, a young woman in a nurse's uniform came forward. Bennett scarcely looked at her. He stood staring at the fair young form on the bed.

"Is she dead?" he asked hoarsely.

The nurse shook her head negatively. Her hand was at her left side over her heart, as if she, too, had been startled. With silent authority, she motioned us from the room and followed us into an adjacent chamber where a lamp burned in a corner.

"Now, tell me who you are and why you came?" she insisted.

It did not occur to me that the explanations should have been hers. I looked at Bennett, but as he did not appear to see me, I answered for him.

"This is Mr. Bennett Tierney, the owner of this property, and I am here in the interest of a client."

"Tell me," broke in Bennett, "will she live?"

The nurse scanned Bennett's drawn face as she answered: "She will live, but she very nearly crossed over this afternoon."

Bennett gulped. "I know it! But why did she come here? Tell me all."

"I don't know all," she returned gently, still looking at Bennett. "She never talked much, but he has told me enough."

"He?" stammered Bennett.

"Her father—Colonel Rogers. Didn't he let you in? He's downstairs trying to compose himself, poor soul."

I confess I was all at sea, but Bennett nodded.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, about all I know is that she married secretly a year ago. She was visiting in the East so that her people did not know her husband. I don't think her father has ever seen him to this day. After a short time, she and her husband had a misunderstanding—not a real quarrel. Some trivial thing in connection with this estate grew into an impossible situation. Sort of a tempest in a teapot, I suppose, which grew into a storm.

"He wanted to live here, but she didn't. So he gave her the keys to the house, telling her when she used them, he would return to her here where they'd begin again. Both were high strung and proud. Oh, very, very proud! It seems she thought he didn't trust her, and as he wouldn't give in, and she wouldn't give in, they separated. She discovered two things, soon afterward."

"Yes—yes," entreated Bennett.

"She discovered that she adored him and—that there was to be a child."

"A child?" cried Bennett.

The woman nodded gravely. "That is why her father and I brought her here secretly a month ago. She wanted her child to be born in her husband's house, and she felt that both of them had been wrong and headstrong. We nearly lost her, but she was so brave, it almost broke my heart, and four hours ago her little son was born."

Bennett took a deep breath. He rubbed the back of one hand against his eyes and did not speak for some time. When he turned quietly to me, his voice seemed strangely unfamiliar.

"McDonald," he said huskily, "rush down to my father-in-law and release him. Do what you can for the old man. I'm going to my wife—and stay there!"

He took a few steps, then stopped. "After that, Mac, drive to the florist's in Maple Valley. Get all the flowers he has—roses, carnations, asters. Make him hurry. They must be here—all around her—when she wakens."

He crept noiselessly away, his face suffused with a vast joy. The nurse and I hurried to Colonel Rogers, who was stil ineffectually struggling with the coils of rope. He accepted my explanations with almost wordless gratitude. I think he was feeling too deeply for speech.

"Scared away some prowlers the other night. Got some money out of the bank yesterday. Guess they saw me and looked through this window. You've probably saved my daughter's life. In her present condition, sir—" and he completed his meaning by a wave of his hand.

I went back to the second floor to get the key to Tierney's car which I recalled he had locked. As I waited at the door to Mrs. Tierney's room while the nurse got the key, I could not refrain from staring in.

The girl's beautiful face was still deathly pale, but I could see the lace

(Continued on page 95)

The Cauldron

True Adventures of Terror

CONDUCTED BY
PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY

WHILE the columns of THE CAULDRON are open to all those knowing of or having experienced genuinely weird or horrifying adventures, the editor wishes to make plain that no more manuscripts dealing with ghosts or any phase of spiritualism will be considered, unless they are of unusual merit. This step is taken because THE CAULDRON is not a department of psychic phenomena, and to discourage authors from submitting articles along these lines, scores of which are received daily. What THE CAULDRON wants, as we state in our heading, are "True Adventures of Terror," and not impossible "spirit" stories.

AFTER I WAS DEAD

(Here is an interesting article, especially so since it represents the work of a fourteen-year-old author.)

I DIED exactly five years ago. That day was somewhat like today and I can remember clearly everything that happened.

Death had always been the most over-shadowing and terrible thought in my life. Often I spent sleepless nights thinking and brooding about death and what should become of me. People laughed at me for this fear nd my few friends pitied me. I hoped that some day I would get over it, but it was impossible.

When I entered college I had only a few chums, and that is the way it remained during my whole college career. I spent my time either in going on long walks or in reading. I never went out into social life at all, and dreams of athletic glory never occupied my mind. It was probably because I did not enter into anything pleasant that these morbid fits came over me.

One day, while I was reading in my room. I suddenly became terribly ill. I quickly threw myself on the bed and gradually my dizzy feeling left me. In its place I felt violent shooting pains around my heart. I saw black spots dancing wildly in front of my eyes and then, blackness and unconsciousness.

When I could see again I was gazing directly at the New York banner which hung over my roommate's bed. I tried to look elsewhere, but found that I could not do so, and when I tried to move my body my efforts were likewise in vain.

I wondered if this was death, the death that I had always feared, and yet, I asked myself, how could it be? All my senses were with me, even if I could not control my body or breath. I wondered what would become of me, what they would think when they discovered me, and if I would recover?

Then through sort of a misty haze, I saw all the incidents of my past existence. How unhappy I had been, living a life of unfriendliness filled with gloomy thoughts. Then I lapsed into unconsciousness.

When I came to, I was lying in the same position as before. I heard footsteps coming up the hall. My roommate came shuffling into the room and turning to me, he said:

"Sorry you didn't see the game, Ben. It was fine."

I felt that way too, although I could not answer.

"Are you sick?" he asked, presently.

Again I could not answer him although I strained as hard as I could.

"Gee!" he muttered, "I guess I had better get someone to look after you."

He hurrid away and presently returned leading Dr. Brantly, the dormitory doctor. He came over and put his ear to my breast. Then turning slowly to my roommate, Lee—

"Richard," he said, solemnly, "this boy has been dead for about two hours. Heart failure, I guess."

"What!" cried Lee, "dead! Yet," he added, "I thought it would be his heart, or some abnormal death, for he was always brooding over something gruesome, and especially about death."

"Too bad," said the doctor, "that boy, I have always felt a strange attraction for. He was possessed of good mental powers, and it is sad that his peculiar dread ruined an otherwise promising life."

The doctor was a large man with big shoulders. His face was round and merry-looking, and his big gray eyes were nearly always twinkling. They were not now, however, as he bent over me and gently closed my eyelids. Then he spread a blanket over my whole body.

"Where does he live?" asked the doctor.

"In Whitehall, Pennsylvania," answered Lee. "His father and mother were killed in a railroad accident. He has a guardian uncle, Mr. Wooding, who is sending him through college. Whitehall is where his mother and father are buried, so I guess that is the only place to send his remains."

His words went deep into my soul. For the first time I realized my true plight. I was going to be buried alive. I tried and pulled and strained to move, and speak, and let them know I was alive. But it was useless. Then again I lost consciousness.

When I came to my senses again I found that I was breathing, but nearly suffocated. I wondered where I was and tried to rise; but could not do so because I was blocked by something above me. Then I remembered that I was supposed to be dead, and this was probably my coffin. I shuddered when I though I had awakened too late, that perhaps I was indeed buried alive. But I did not give up hope although I was nervous and nearly fainting. I tapped the upper boards with my fingers and the sound was sufficient to tell me that there was no heavy weight resting on the coffin. I braced my stiff shoulders against the lid, expecting to find resistance, but it was not even nailed and was easily lifted off, without much noise.

With much effort I got upon my feet. My whole body ached and my limbs were stiff as a result of my cramped position in the coffin. I then turned my attention to finding out where I was. I heard a clock ticking in the corner of the room. I walked over toward it. At the same time the moon rose from behind the trees and the moonlight flooded the room. Then I realized that I was at the home of my uncle, James Wooding.

I asked myself if I should go to him, but I knew what a shock it would be, and I was convinced of the fact that Uncle Jim had no real affection for me, but just pitied me, I decided that no one should know.

Softly I tiptoed to the next room, and gathering some heavy books and a small rug, I deposited them in the coffin. Then I draped the cloth that had covered my own body, over this pile of junk. I replaced the top and was about to leave when it suddenly occurred to me to see what time it was. I looked at the clock, and by the light of the moon I could see it was exactly twelve. By the calendar hanging near I found it was Friday, October 15th. I suddenly realized that it was my birthday, and also that I was born at twelve o'clock, twenty-three years ago. Now here I was born again, risen from the coffin.

I crawled silently out of an open window into the cold night. I felt weak and stiff, but after walking a while I limbered up and was able to break into a run. I don't remember how far I ran, but the strain was too great and finally I fell to the road exhausted.

The next thing I remember was the warm breath of a nurse who was bending over me. She told me how I was found delirious on the road and was brought to a hospital. When I asked her, she said I would be able to leave in a week, and that I was in Townville, which was not far from Philadelphia. She gave me a paper to read, and glancing it over, I saw a short notice about my funeral. No one had found out.

That was five years ago. Now, indeed am I born again. The fear of death has left me, and I am living a happy, normal life. And furthermore, I know the sweetest girl in the whole world is engaged to me.

JOHN W. WALTON.

MYSTERIOUS RADIO

(The authenticity of this article is doubtful. It is published simply for any interest it may contain for our readers who are radio 'fans.")

IT WAS MY fortune when a child to have been gifted with an uncanny knowledge of Science; that branch of Science which deals with Electricity particularly held my attention.

When but a boy I turned my talent toward a field that was destined to lead me into a labyrinth of strange events which are probably way ahead of the present day. Radio was my latest habit and I went into it head over heels never dreaming of anything else, barely noticing what I ate at the dinner table.

After a few years of hard work I soon had a laboratory as complete as any in the country. At the school I was classed as rather queer having such fancy titles as Professor and Doctor thrust upon me.

Up to this time my experiments had been confined chiefly to the ordinary trend of wireless such as perfecting high power transmitters and efficient receivers. I had also developed a high voltage transmitter that by a system of filtered side band waves I was able to transmit electrical energy over the ether. As yet I had not the desire nor the money to patent this latest invention and consequently no one save myself knew anything of it.

Caring more for the betterment of the Art than for the money in it I naturally wished to further my experiments along perfecting my latest invention.

One night while testing out a special receiver which would go with the new transmitter, I noticed the ultra Radiotron bulb which I was using would glow up with a bluish flame. Looking excitedly at the voltmeter in the plate circuit, I saw that the current jumped from 200 volts to about 1500. This, I surmised, was probably due to the motor generator, but on looking to this source, I saw that the meter read a steady 200 volts.

By this time I had become thoroughly excited and was for the moment undecided what to do. Then suddenly, the fluctuations stopped and although I waited for an hour they did not appear again.

The next night at the same hour—midnight, I turned my receiver around fifty hundred thousand meters, a wave length that is beyond the capacity of any transmitter or receivers so far developed by mortal man.

No sooner had I balanced my grid condenser to that of the secondary plate condenser, than the bulb began to fluctuate violently, even more so than the night before. By some electrical phenomenon this increase and decrease in potential blew the fuse in the lighting circuit and left my room in a state of semi-darkness, only lit up by the bulb.

The bluish light from the bulb played upon the walls of my little laboratory creating fantastic apparitions and as I sat there a tremor ran through my frame which I attempted to shake off.

Watching the light on the wall I perceived that a strange systematic color scheme was prevalent when the bulb reached its highest point of incandescence. This gave me an idea and taking from the table the automatic projecting relay which I was experimenting on, I connected it to the receiver. Instantly, the bluish flames stopped and in their place a white oval appeared on the wall. At the same time I noticed the light in the bulbs slowly died out and to my anger I found the batteries, when tested, were empty.

The next day my batteries were placed on the charger and I looked eagerly forward to the evening when they would be full.

Early that night I went to my room and throwing over the aerial switch, I did a little transatlantic phone work, which didn't hold much interest for me, so I snapped off my old set and turned toward my other apparatus.

First, I put a screen on the wall in front of the projector and then I took care to look at the modulatory transformers to be sure the resistances were properly adjusted. This done, I walked over to my bureau and reaching in the top drawer pulled out an automatic which I placed in my pocket and turned off the light.

It was blacker than the River Styx, and I stumbled over to my set quickly mapping on the bulbs.

The white oval appeared on the screen as the night before only giving a much clearer and steadier light. I looked down at the wavemeter and saw that it read five hundred thousand meters. This was too much so I sent it down to ten thousand.

As I remember now, it was a great moment for me! When I looked down upon that screen beheld a scene which took my breath away. I recollect that it took place in Egypt, thousands of years ago. There sat the Pharaoh in all his glory amidst the surroundings of his court while off in an adjoining chamber the musicians of the harem played wailing jazz.

Then the big idea and alas, the fatal idea came into my mind. Adjusting the vernier on my capacitance I was able to throw upon the screen any scene I desired.

I added another loading coil and used this for tuning as it was very selective. After a few minutes of calculating I hit upon a place that seemed rather unusual.

The screen assumed a grayish hue broken in places by blotches of black. An intense stillness fell upon the room. It was terrible! My hands fell away from the dials and dropped to my side like sticks. I tried to rise but I was absolutely paralyzed. Again, my eyes wandered upon the screen. My teeth began to chatter and my hair stood on end! Oh, if someone would only come into the laboratory, a friend or even a dog—anything to relieve the suspense!

Slowly! Slowly! Shadows formed! Twisting, twirling rings of blackness that finally plunged into one seething mass covering the whole of the screen.

The room was filled with a stifling odor of decay reminding me of a freshly opened grave. The shadows on the screen took on an oblong shape, which I recognized as that of a corpse.

Not daring to take my eyes from the screen I beheld the terrible apparition slowly rise and advance forward. I attempted to yell but when I went through the motion only a dry rattling echoed from my throat.

The figure was well upon me now, so close in fact that its cold breath chilled my frame and polluted my nostrils with reeking stench.

Then I happened to remember the automatic in my pocket! I tried my arm and found it free. Grasping the gun I pointed it and pulled the trigger! A flash! A deafening roar! Then peace!—And quiet!—and rest!

I asked the nurse and she told me how they had found me lying with an exploded gun in my hand amidst a wreckage of condensers, tubes, sockets, burned out rheostats and other apparatus. That had been weeks ago and I had just regained a consciousness today.

I can't explain why the gun exploded but when I regain my health and get some backing, I'm going to patent that invention—the Devil, himself, can't stop me.

BY MAXWELL LEVEY.

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

(*Continued from page 73*)

Unreal! Even while I breathed there came to my nostrils the breath of the vapour of heated iron! A suffocating odour pervaded the prison! A deeper glow settled each moment in the eyes that glared at my agonies! A richer tint of crimson diffused itself over the pictured horrors of blood. I panted! I gasped for breath! There could be no doubt of the design of my tormentors—oh! most unrelenting! oh! most demoniac of men! I shrank from the glowing metal to the centre of the cell. Amid the thought of the fiery destruction that impended, the idea of the coolness of the well came over my soul like balm. I rushed to its deadly brink. I threw my straining vision below. The glare from the enkindled roof illumined its inmost recesses. Yet, for a wild moment, did my spirit refuse to comprehend the meaning of what I saw. At length it forced—it wrestled its way into my soul— it burned itself in upon my shuddering reason.—Oh! for a voice to speak!—oh! horror!—oh! any horror but this! With a shriek, I rushed from the margin, and buried my face in my hands—weeping bitterly.

The heat rapidly increased, and once again I looked up, shuddering as with a fit of the ague. There had been a second change in the cell—and now the change was obviously in the *form*. As before, it was in vain that I, at first, endeavoured to appreciate or understand what was taking place. But not long was I left in doubt. The Inquisitorial vengeance had been hurried by my two-fold escape, and there was to be no more dallying with the King of Terrors. The room had been square. I saw that two of its iron angles were now acute—two, consequently, obtuse. The fearful difference quickly increased with a low rumbling or moaning sound. In an instant the apartment had shifted its form into that of a lozenge. But the alteration stopped not here—I neither hoped nor desired it to stop. I could have clasped the red walls to my bosom as a garment of eternal peace. "Death," I said, "any death but that of the pit!" Fool! might I have not known that *into the pit* it was the object of the burning iron to urge me? Could I resist its glow? or, if even that, could I withstand its pressure? And now, flatter and flatter grew the lozenge, with a rapidity that left me no time for contemplation. Its centre, and of course, its greatest width, came just over the yawning gulf. I shrank back—but the closing walls pressed me resistlessly onward. At length for my seared and writhing body there was no longer an inch of foothold on the firm floor of the prison. I struggled no more, but the agony of my soul found vent in one loud, long, and final scream of despair. I felt that I tottered upon the brink—I averted my eyes—

There was a discordant hum of human voices! There was a loud blast as of many trumpets! There was a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders! The fiery walls rushed back! An out-stretched arm caught my own as I fell, fainting into the abyss. It was that of General Lasalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies.

THE EYRIE

STILL our readers continue to tell us what's wrong with our magazine—and also what's right with it.

Our Vox Pop mail is heavier than ever; and this indicates that WEIRD TALES is steadily widening its circle of readers. And that, you may be sure, doesn't displease us any.

Some of our correspondents are ecstatically delighted, some are only moderately satisfied, and some are woefully disappointed, with the magazine we're trying to edit. That doesn't irk us either. We shall never be troubled, in fact, so long as people write to us—either in praise or disparagement. That shows, at any rate, that WEIRD TALES is being read and discussed.

But if they cease to say what they think of the magazine—if they ever stop caring about it, one way or the other—why, then, of course we WILL begin to worry. We'll know then that something is wrong somewhere.

We've often remarked in these Columns of Cunning that nobody can make us sore, no matter how hard he slams our magazine; and we've gone even further and declared that our calumnious letters are read with keener interest than those that flatter us. And, just to prove that we meant what we said, we're going to start The Eyrie this month with all the lampoons we've received in four weeks.

There are only three, as it happens, and here they are:

> **"My Dear Mr. Baird: 'The Invisible Terror,' in the June number of WEIRD TALES, is much like Bierce's 'The Damned Thing.' 'The Gray Death' is very like 'The Silver Menace,' published a decade ago. 'Penelope,' in May WEIRD TALES, is very like 'Phoebe' of some years ago—the better of the two. Phoebe was the malignant star, and the man married Phoebe.**
>
> **" 'One of the Bunch' wrote you that 'The Phantom Wolfhound' was 'fairly well written, but mighty unconvincing.' I do not agree with 'One,' so far as unconvincing goes. The child grieved for her dog and dreamed about him. Mr. Ritsky was sensitive and received by telepathy the vibrating thoughts of the child, strongest when she was asleep. They disturbed his rest and probably pricked his conscience, causing distressing mental pictures. . . . The only criticism I have to make of the story is the 'white thing' floating from between the child's lips. Thoughts are invisible. . . .**
>
> **. . . . . "I like 'The Evening Wolves,' 'The Two Men Who Murdered Each Other,' and 'The Guard of Honor.' I don't like brutal murder stories or stories of horrible crime."**

That came from a young woman in Hayward, California, who, though signing her name, requested us to credit her criticism to "An Old Fashioned Woman." And the next was written by a gentleman of Jersey City, who likewise asked to have his name omitted:

> **Dear Sir: Referring to Mr. Francis Steven's tale, 'Sunfire,' in the July-August issue of WEIRD TALES. This is a good tale, so far, but I would like to make the following comment: I have always understood that the great desideratum in all story telling was an appearance or effect of realism, truth or plausibility, brought about by the adherence of statements as close to actual facts as possible. Now, after several hundred, or possibly several thousand, years of mining, a diamond of half a ton weight, as the diamond in your story, is manifestly absurd; and do you not think that the story would have been better if, say, a nugget or ingot of silver, gold or platinum, all of which are also found in South America, had been mentioned, hammered and polished in mirror form?**
>
> **"Half-ton (or, as they would say in Latin America, 500 kilograms), nuggets or ingots are not beyond the bounds of possibility, and may have actually been found, hammered or cast. Ingots can be cast of this weight. Or a slab or plate of this weight, set with large diamonds, somewhat on the manner of modern vault lights or sidewalk lights, would have imparted a touch of realism which would also have been sufficiently bizarre or outre to keep the story under the heading, 'Weird,' and furnished enough 'sunfire.'**
>
> **"But having both the centipede and the diamond oversize to such an extent is piling it on a bit thick, although the centipede, being alive, might possibly have been developed in some way to help out on the weirdness.—J. L."**

And the third comes from Dick P. Tooker, of Minneapolis:

> **"I have purchased every issue of your magazine since it was begun, and I believe you are filling a position in the magazine field that has long needed filling. I was disappointed in not getting a complete July issue. Like some of the readers wrote in The Eyrie, I believe the first two issues of WEIRD TALES were the best. You are running a few stories every month that are as good as your first ones, but in the last two issues especially I have caught myself yawning when half way through several of them. But no one would think of yawning while reading 'Shades' or 'The Room of the Black Velvet Drapes.' Please keep on improving your covers."**

AND now, having disposed of that trio of roasts (which quite failed to blister us), let us turn to those letters of another sort. First, we shall consider this one from Joel Shoemaker of 4116 Aiken Avenue, Seattle, Washington:

"My Dear Brother Baird: The big double number, with thirteen thrilling short stories, two complete novelettes and two two-part stories, is before me. It is a fine number. We waited a long time for it. There are six grown-ups in my family—myself and wife and two sons and two daughters—and we all want WEIRD TALES as soon as it reaches the newsdealer.

"Of course, I kept my eye out for the first copy that might land in the city. Every newsdealer heard my voice asking why WEIRD TALES did not show up. No one could give me information.

"Then there came the big July-August number. It was picked up without even the formality of asking the salesman. Then the trouble began, for all wanted to read WEIRD TALES. It was so big, had so many stories, and was so interesting that it was a case of 'finders, keepers,' and 'possession is nine points of the law,' while one had the magazine and five wanted to get eyes on it.

"The magazine suits me fine. . . . We need more of the real salt of the earth to go with the iron that we pick up from the raisins, grapes and other sources, and in WEIRD TALES you have struck the vein of salt that preserves life."

And, next, the following from Lee Torpie, of 1204 Mason Street, San Francisco:

"Dear Sir: I used to think reading magazines a waste of time, until last April, when, quite by chance, I bought a copy of WEIRD TALES for March—the first issue. Since then, I've watched for your magazine eagerly each month; I found it filled in pleasantly bits of spare time, too brief for the reading of books. The stories were the sort I liked best, and while I cannot account for the scarcity of such fiction, I know from experience how hard it is to get.

"With my discovery of WEIRD TALES, I felt the problem of finding interesting reading matter for the little leisure I have was solved. Getting my copy for April wasn't all beer and skittles—I secured the first copy in a town where I was stopping at the time, and when I came to look for the magazine in San Francisco, I entered several bookstores and stopped at many magazine stands before I found an enlightened druggist who supplied me with the April number. I went there for the May and June issues.

"To my consternation, when I called for the July number, the druggist said it hadn't come in. Since then, I have haunted that drug store—daily at first, till the clerk greeted me with a grin and a shake of the head before I had time to ask him the momentous question.

"So I am appealing to you. Perhaps you have decided not to market WEIRD TALES on the Pacific Coast; if that is the reason for my inability to get the July issue, I'll go into the subscriber class, if I may—then I'll be sure to have the magazine each month."

Mr. Torpie, we are happy to say, has since read our July-August issue, and, we hope, the September number, too.

HERE is one that we're not quite sure about. Maybe it belongs in that first batch. Maybe not. At any rate, here goes:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I was not disappointed in the June number of WEIRD TALES. I was only disappointed in not finding that magazine on the newsstands for July. I thought that either you or WEIRD TALES had died suddenly! I was reassured, however, when I beheld its welcome resurrection in August, so I put aside thoughts of mourning weeds.

"I liked the June number very well, excepting the reprint of Poe's Morgue Street Murders, my contention being that everybody who has read anything is already familiar with such literature; that you reprint them for the inconsequential minority, hence the pages upon which they are printed is so much waste paper to the greater number. Miss Burchard, I note, opposes this theory and even suggests that you reprint Sherlock Holmes! Now, I would ask Miss B. who under the canopy is not familiar with those famous stories? Who among the readers of WEIRD TALES hasn't already been satiated with them—'The Speckled Band,' 'The End of the Passage,' and so on?

"In these days, when a subscription to certain periodicals carries with it a set of Poe, Doyle, Bulwer, O. Henry, such reading is within the reach of all. 'The Upper Berth' is an exception, I fancy, and I hope we may have it should you lay hands on it. I am, however, open to conviction, and if you ever think of taking a census of opinion in the matter I shall bow to the majority.

"P. S.—The July-August number was very interesting in that there was neither love mush nor old junk of the Bulwer type. 'Sunfire' is immense, and the close of 'Evening Wolves' was quite as it should be."

The foregoing was written by Dr. Henry C. Murphy of Brooklyn; and, before we comment upon it, we rise to remark that WEIRD TALES seems to offer a special appeal to physicians and surgeons. They like to read our sort of stories, and they like to write 'em. There is scarcely a day that we don't get at least one weird story written by a doctor. Doctors, it seems, encounter some weird adventures.

With regard to the argument against reprinting weird classics, so ably presented by Dr. Murphy, we'll say there's an even greater division of opinion on this than there is on the matter of serials. Since the publication of Miss Burchard's letter we've received at least two dozen communications informing us that "The Upper Berth" was written by F. Marion Crawford and earnestly requesting us to reprint this story and others like it. Opposed to these, we have some eight or ten letters telling us bluntly to lay off the old stuff. What to do? . . . Well, since Dr. Murphy says he will bow to the majority, I suppose we'd best do the same thing—and give "The Upper Berth" another run. (The Pullman Company should thank us, anyway.)

YOU may recall the letter from H. P. Lovecraft, published here last month. A bit caustic, that letter; and today we have pleasure in offering another, which, if less stinging, is none-the-less enjoyable. Our friend Lovecraft always has something to say when he writes. Thus:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I should apologize if my former letter seemed to tax WEIRD TALES with seeking conventional material. Such was not my intention in any way. I only meant that I presumed you would not wish too subtle or cryptical material for presentation to the general public. There is a difference between mere originality and delicate symbolism, or hideously nebulous adumbration. How many American readers outside the frankly 'highbrow' class, for example, would find any pleasure or coherent impression in Arthur Machen's 'The White People,' or in the fantastic passages of the same author's 'Hill of Dreams'? In a word, I take it that WEIRD TALES wants definite stories, with a maximum of plot, tension of situation, explosive climax, and statement rather than too elusive suggestion—this rather than the Baudelairian prose-poem of spiritual Satanism, where chiseled phrase, lyrical tone, color, and an opiate luxuriance of exotic imagery form the chief sources of the macabre impression. . . .

"I lately read the May WEIRD TALES, and congratulate you on Mr. Humphrey's 'The Floor Above.' [for a moment I had a shiver which the author didn't intend—I thought he was going to use an idea which I am planning to use myself!! But it wasn't so, after all], which is a close second to my favorite, 'Beyond the Door.' Evidently my taste runs to the architectural! 'Penelope' is clever—but Holy Pete! If the illustrious Starrett's ignorance of astronomy is an artfully conceived attribute of his character's whimsical narrative, I'll say he's right there with the verisimilitude! I wrote monthly astronomical articles for the daily press between 1906 and 1918, and have a vast affection for the celestial spheres.

"Some day I may send you a possible filler, beginning:

"Through the ghoul-guarded gateways of slumber,
Past the wan-moon'd abysses of night,
I have lived o'er my lives without number,
I have sounded all things with my sight—
And I struggle and shriek ere the daybreak, being driven to madness and fright."

Mr. Lovecraft, you will observe, is quite as deft with poetry as he is with prose; and, as further evidence of this, we submit the prologue to a 300-line heroic poem of his that we may print some day:

"I am he who howls in the night;
I am he who moans in the snow;
I am he who hath never seen light;
I am he who mounts from below.
My car is the car of death;
My wings are the wings of dread;
My breath is the north wind's breath;
My prey are the cold and dead."

As you know, we are publishing a series of Mr. Lovecraft's prose pieces, beginning with "Dagon;" and of this story he wrote us, in part:

"I shall venture 'Dagon' as a sort of test of my stuff in general. If you don't care for this, you won't care for anything of mine. . . . It is not that 'Dagon' is the best of my tales, but that it is perhaps the most direct and least subtle in its 'punch'; so that for popular publication it is most likely to please most. In copying it I have touched up one or two crude spots—it having been written in 1917, directly after a lull of nine years in my fiction-writing. Naturally I was a bit rusty in the management of the prose. A friend of mine—Clark Ashton Smith, the California poet of horror, madness and morbid beauty—showed this yarn to George Sterling, who declared he liked it very much, though suggesting (absurdly enough, as I view it!) that I have the monolith topple over and kill the 'thing' . . . a piece of advice which makes me feel that poets should stick to their sonneteering. . .

"My love of the weird makes me eager to do anything I can to put good material in the path of a magazine which so gratifyingly cultivates that favorite element. I shall await with interest the next issues, with the tales you mention, and am meanwhile trying to get the opening number through a newsdealer. I am sure the venture will elicit some notable contributions as its fame spreads—and the extent of that fame may be judged from the fact that people in Massachusetts, New York, Ohio and California have been equally prompt in calling my attention to it and urging me to try my luck!"

In a way, "Dagon" is a radically different sort of story, even for WEIRD TALES, and those that will follow it are even more so. For this reason, we shall be particularly interested in hearing what our readers think of the Lovecraft tales.

THE EDITOR.

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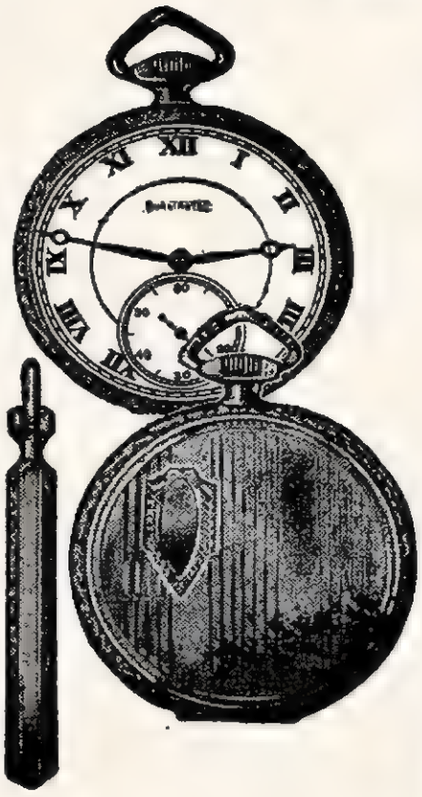

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The People of the Comet

(Continued from page 37)

to hold our balance. But I had time to get our surroundings.

"'We were on a thumb! It was bearing us across the room. The shrill thunder was laughter. We were astride the thumb nail! We had come out just underneath the nail! That was what I had taken for the great semi-transparent roof.

"'The gulf grew smaller, and I beheld a vast flat surface below us. The thumb had lifted us upon a table. We were in an immense room, full of men, vast forms, unlike any I had ever seen. They were moving about and all talking at once. The noise was terrible.

"'Still we were growing!

"'At last we were large enough to step off the thumb to the table. I took Sora's hand in mine and stood up.

"'In a few minutes we were large enough to understand our surroundings. The men were grouped about us—great wonderful beings, bearded and splendid! They were gazing down upon us, with eyes filled with wonder. I saw that we were as miraculous to them as they were to us. I held Sora's arm and made a sweep with my hand, trying to convey the suggestion that I wanted them to sit down.

"'They seemed to understand. That was better. In their chairs they were not so terrible.

"'"Oh, Alvas! What sort of a room is this? What is that thing hanging, yonder, from the ceiling?"

"'I looked and saw we were in an observatory. The men were astronomers! The thing that hung from the ceiling was a telescope. They were studying stars.

CHAPTER NINE

"'THESE supermen had set out to solve the riddle of the stars. I pointed to the telescope. If I could only let them know what I knew, and make them understand how we had come. I tried to convey my meaning of an earth. They held their heads close to the table. Again I pointed to the telescope. I would see the stars! Finally I made them understand. One of them placed his hand, palm up, upon the table. It was an immense hand. When we did not move he touched us with his finger. The next instant Sora and I were being borne to the telescope.

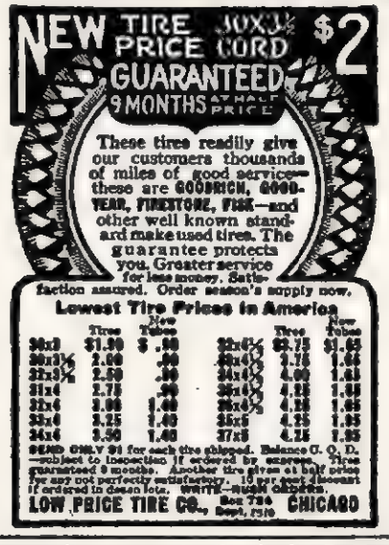
"'It was an immense affair. The eyepiece alone was twenty-six inches across, so that it was much like looking through the immense lense of one of our own telescopes.

"'I could see stars, and constellations, and moons. The structure of this major plane was much like our own solar system. There was a similarity that was striking.

"'The men were watching us, their great eyes glowing like huge fires of intelligence. Their curiosity had been excited by our interest in their telescope. They spoke and rumbled together; and gesticulated with their hands. At last they seemed to come to an agreement. The hand that held us conveyed us, as tenderly as possible, back to the table.

"'Then one of them stretched a white substance, much like parchment, out at my feet. He placed a long cane in my hand. The cane was a pencil. The great eyes were watching, wondering if I could understand. Then I realized what was wanted. I could not speak nor explain

(Continued on page 86)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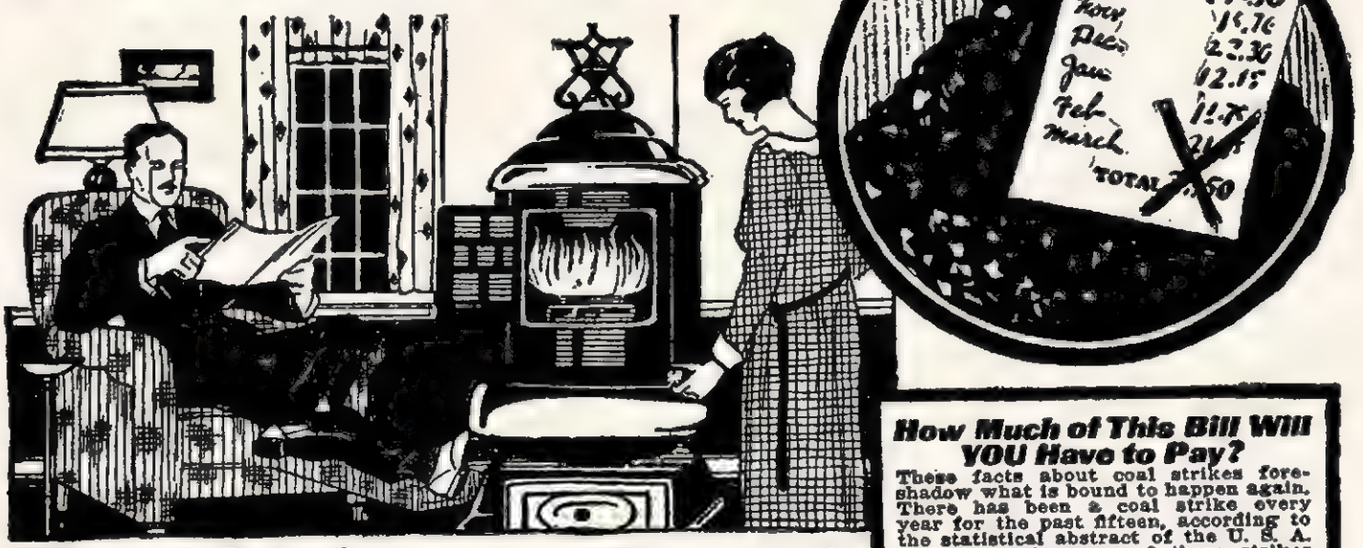

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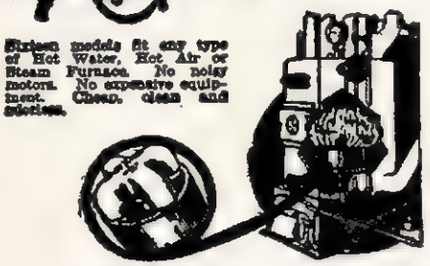

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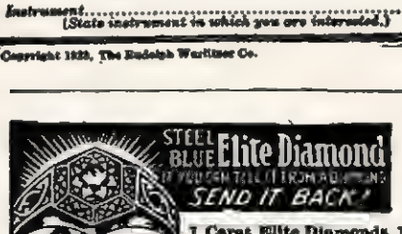

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THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET

(Continued from page 84)

with my eyes. But I could draw. And that is what I did.

"'First I drew the outline of a large thumb. Then I drew a circle for the Earth inside of it, and stars and a moon and a sun. After that I drew a picture of a crude telescope and a man. Then I pointed at myself.

"'They seemed to understand. There was a great deal of rumbling and wonder. I pointed to their telescope and held my finger toward the stars overhead.

"'Just then Sora clutched my arm.

"'"Alvas!" she exclaimed, "Alvas! I feel. I am—"

"'She did not finished. Something seemed to smother her; her voice grew weak. I felt her sinking on my arm. I turned and caught her. At the same instant everything about me appeared to shoot upward. For a minute I had a feeling of weakness. And then I understood. We were growing smaller. We were going back to the thumb.

"'Just then something happened. We were picked up and carried through the air. Then we were landed upon the transparent substance that had puzzled us at first. I knew now where we were and what we must do. Sora had recovered; she had my hand in hers, and she seemed to understand. Our going back was much like flight. We raced, hand in hand, across the surface until we came to the edge. Then we leaped over the rim. Something seemed to be drawing us on.

"'We were just in time. The semi-transparent nail had grown into a roof. I paused to take one last look at the wonderful world. I looked up outside of the roof, and I saw a vast round circle around a monster eye. They were watching us in our flight! I caught Sora's hand and we raced under the roof into oblivion.

"'THE rest is soon told.

"'The next we knew was the comet. We were standing outside the house whence we had departed. We had apparently been gone but a few minutes.

"'But it was not the same comet that we had known. The terrible rim was almost burnt out; and of the vast coma there was only a glow remaining. It was a vastly different place from the wonderful little world we had known.

"'However, everything else was just as we had left it. We went into the house. The comet clock was still running; the indicator was back on the track. Sora caught my arm.

(Continued on page 88)

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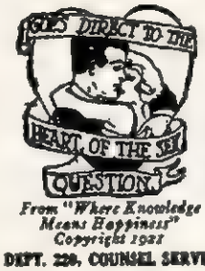

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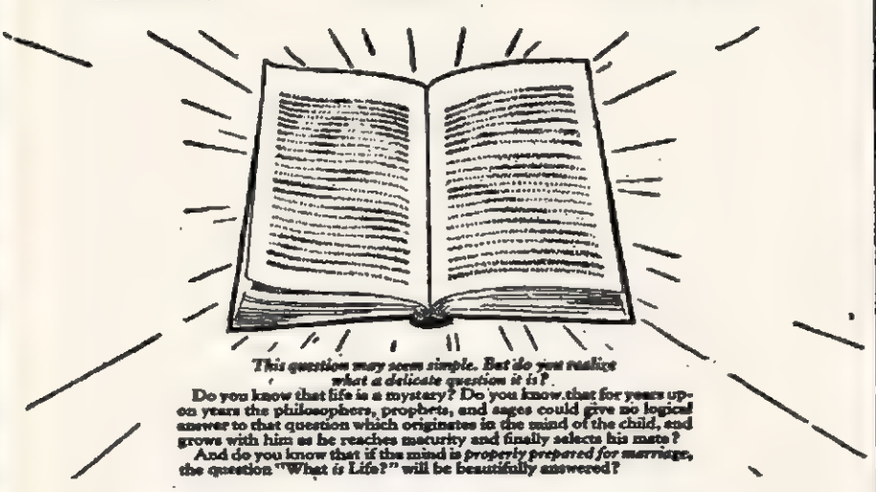
"and What *IS* Life?"



This question may seem simple. But do you realize what a delicate question it is?

Do you know that life is a mystery? Do you know that for years upon years the philosophers, prophets, and sages could give no logical answer to that question which originates in the mind of the child, and grows with him as he reaches maturity and finally selects his mate?

And do you know that if the mind is *properly prepared for marriage*, the question "What *is* Life?" will be beautifully answered?

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Every mother or father will some day be confronted by a little, innocent face that will ask a question which will be far more difficult to answer than a query on the Einstein theory.

Yet that question *must* be answered, and answered in detail. For if it remains unanswered by the parents, it will be answered by others far less capable. And at this juncture the tree of perversion takes root in the adolescent mind.

PARENTS—CAN YOU ANSWER?

You may be able to answer to yourself. But can you answer to some one less mature? And can you answer in the *right* way—the way which will not foster thoughts of dark, mysterious things, or things which are not plain and evident? Could you, as a mother, reveal the questions of sex to your daughter without implanting fear or horror in her mind? Could you, as a father, explain conception to your son without your words being misinterpreted?

This, the MASTER BOOK OF SEX, *will guide you.* Bernard Bernard—a man who has devoted his life to the advancement of clean and right living—has answered this very question scores of times, not only to children, but to mothers, fathers, and especially to *young men and women who contemplate marriage.*

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THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET

(Continued from page 86)

"'"Look, Alvas!" she exclaimed.

"'And then I looked and saw, and understood. We were approaching my own Earth. The indicator was just at the dot that Sora had marked upon my arrival.

"'That is about all.

"'We rushed out to the ether ship, stored up what data we could gather and discarded all inside of the ship that we could dispense with. Then we set sail from the comet.

"'We had an uneventful trip. We have just landed. We saw this light and we came to it. This is our Earth. I have told you our story.'"

"He stopped," said Professor Mason, "and waited for me to speak. I watched them—the man and the maiden. They were beautiful beyond anything I had ever seen. The girl stood by her lover waiting for me to speak. At last I asked:

"'Then our solar system is but an atom?'

"'Yes. Just as the atoms below us act according to their relative planetary and solar laws, which we call atomic, so does our system, in the great scheme of things, act to the world above us. Everything is relative.'

"'But millions of years! You were in the upper plane only a few minutes!'

"'That is easily explained. The atoms below us are revolving at an incredible speed. Each revolution about the atomic nucleus represents a year. A minute in our plane is equal to millions within the atom. And so it is in the upper plane. It is a question of relativity. I was outside our Universe a few minutes. To the inside that represents millions of years. But I can understand your wonder, because I was misled myself. I thought I had been gone but a few weeks. I had not calculated the time in the outer plane. I did not understand until you showed me this place, which you call—California.'

"Just then the girl spoke up:

"'Alvas, I would like a drink. I feel thirsty. I—I feel like—'

"I noticed that she had turned very white; almost deathlike. The young man turned. He was frightened.

"'Hurry!' he spoke. 'Get her some water!'

"His manner was strange. I noticed that he, too, was pale. I rushed out of the room.

"While I was gone he called several times. I noticed that each time his voice was weaker. I was in a flutter of excite-

ment; mainly because I could not understand. Something, I knew, was wrong. I could sense it. But I knew not what.

"I rushed back with the water in my hand. And then I stopped. Stopped and stood still, the glass in my hand, looking for my strange companions. They were gone!

"Gone? No! There they were upon the floor, incredibly diminutive! They were not more than six inches high. The man was holding the maiden in his arms. He was waving and gesticulating; and he was pointing at my thumb!

"I stooped down, and at his sign held my thumb upon the floor. I remember speaking and wondering why I spoke.

"'Here,' I said. 'Hop on my thumb.'

"Which he did.

"He was not much taller now than a fly. I watched him run over the nail and drop over the edge. The maiden was still in his arms. Then he disappeared.

"I caught up a microscope. Through the lense everything was larger; and I got one last glimpse. He was standing just under the edge of my thumb nail, looking up. He waved his hand. Then he turned and fled under the thumb nail with the maiden!"

Such was Professor Mason's story.

"Well?" I asked.

Professor Mason did not answer. He lapsed into deep thought. The same abstraction that I had noted during the previous nights returned to his features.

"Well?" I asked again.

He looked up.

"That is my story. I would like my microscope."

His voice had its old plaintiveness. It was the same tone that I had heard earlier in the evening. I passed him back his microscope. Professor Mason is a good old soul.

When I left him he was peering through the lens at his thumb.

THE END.

THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN

(Continued from page 38)

foot through the moss covering, and had discovered the heavy leather bag.

Uncomplainingly, the tired father carried the bag of gold home. He counted the money out on the table—one thousand nine hundred and twenty-three dollars in gold.

"A dollar for every year of the Christian era!" exclaimed the pious Mr. Diggs.

Truly it was enough to make even a worldly man rejoice spiritually. Danny had indeed discovered the tree with the golden leaves!

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THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN LILY

(*Continued from page* 62)

"Crawdell, as you, Dale, know, is an excellent stage manager. He believes in seeing to every detail himself, consequently the stage hands were not at all surprised when he insisted on supervising the arrangements for lighting the golden lily which was so effectively used by Carol at the conclusion of her dance. You may remember that some weeks ago the light in the lily nearly failed to act.

"Some defect was discovered just in time by Crawdell himself, and after that he got the electrician to teach him enough to allow him to look after the thing himself in future. Whether he himself contrived the original defect, or whether it suggested the eventual plot to Mademoiselle Nadia is immaterial. They evolved a plan as novel as it was fiendish. As you know, the current supplying the globe in the lily was conveyed by means of thin wires, invisible to the audience, from an electrical supply behind the scenes. For convenience, the ends of the wires terminated in a small plug which was fitted to a wire taken to a point not far from the stage.

"It was an obscure corner, where there was just light enough when the lights were down for a person to move without falling. Crawdell, as I have discovered, came to the theater early this morning, and busied himself with the golden lily and the arrangements for lighting it. This occasioned no surprise, as he would naturally be anxious that nothing should go wrong on this night of all nights, and the staff were accustomed to what they described as his fussy ways.

"As a matter of fact, Crawdell, who had learned more about electricity than his teacher supposed, had fitted a wire to the main cable which conveys the enormously powerful current used for the great lights of the auditorium. You do not need to be electricians to understand that when this powerful current was passed into the globe in the lily, the globe could not stand it, and was instantly shattered. Nadia and Crawdell had observed that Carol always raised the lily to her face, and they naturally expected that the explosion would blind her—blind her at the moment of her triumph and on the eve of her wedding—"

Dale's fist crashing down on his table cut him short.

"What a hellish plot!" he cried.

Nadia and Crawdell had sprung to their feet, but Paul's hand came quickly from his pocket, holding an automatic pistol.

(*Continued on page* 92)

If New Hair Doesn't Grow After Using My Method —*I Don't Want a Penny!*

I mean just exactly what I say! I don't care how thin your hair may be—I don't care how many treatments you have taken without results. If my new discovery won't restore your hair, I don't want to keep a cent of your money! Furthermore I'll send you the proof of what I have done for others entirely FREE! Just mail the coupon below

By ALOIS MERKE
Founder of Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Ave., New York

AFTER 17 years' experience in treating baldness — which included long years of experimentation in Heidelberg, Paris, Berlin, Geneva, Cairo and other centers of scientific research—I have discovered a startling new way to promote hair growth.

At the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York — which I founded — I have treated scores of prominent stage and social celebrities. People are coming to me from all parts of the country to gain the benefits of my discovery. Many pay as high as $500 for the results I have brought them.

Yet now, through a series of ingenious inventions, I have made it possible for every one to avail themselves of my discovery—right in their own homes, and at a cost of only a few cents a day!

My Unusual Guarantee!

I know you are skeptical. I know that you have tried perhaps dozens of different remedies and treatments without results. I know that you have wasted time and money on treatments which by their very nature could NEVER restore your hair. All right. Perhaps my treatment cannot help you, either. I don't know. But I do know that it has banished falling hair and dandruff for hundreds of others —often with the first few treatments. I do know that it has already given thick, luxuriant hair to people who long ago had despaired of regaining their hair. And I am so downright positive that it will do the same for you that I am entirely willing to let you try it at my risk—and if it fails to restore your hair, then I'll instantly—and gladly—mail you a check, refunding every cent you have paid me. In other words, I absolutely GUARANTEE to grow new hair on your head—and if I fail, then the test is free.

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What is my method? It is entirely new. It is entirely different from anything you ever heard of. No massaging—no singeing—no "mange" cures—no unnecessary fuss or bother of any kind. Yet results are usually noticeable even after the very first few treatments.

Many people have the idea that when the hair falls out and no new hair appears, that the hair roots are always dead.

I have disproved this. For I have found in many cases which have come under my observation that the hair roots were NOT dead, but merely dormant! Through undernourishment, dandruff and other causes, these starving, shrunken roots had literally gone into a state of "suspended animation." Yet even if the scalp is completely bare, it is now possible in the majority of cases to *awaken* these dormant roots, and stimulate an entirely new growth of healthy hair! I KNOW this to be true—because I do it every day.

Ordinary measures failed to grow hair because they did not penetrate to these dormant roots. To make a tree grow, you would not think of rubbing "growing fluid" on the bark. Instead, you would get right to the roots. And so it is with the hair.

In all the world there is only one method I know about of penetrating direct to the roots and getting nourishment to them. And this method is embodied in the treatment that I now offer you on my positive guarantee of satisfactory results, or the trial costs you nothing. The treatment can be used in any home in which there is electricity.

Already hundreds of men and women who only recently were bald or troubled with thin, falling hair, have through this method, acquired hair so thick that it is the envy and admiration of their friends. As for dandruff and similar scalp disorders, these usually disappear after the first few applications.

Remember—I do not ask you to risk "one penny" in trying this treatment. I am perfectly willing to let you try it on my absolute GUARANTEE—and if after 30 days you are not more than delighted with the growth of hair produced, then I'll gladly return every cent you have paid me. I don't want your money unless I grow hair on your head.

Free Booklet Explains Treatment

If you will merely fill in and mail the coupon below I will gladly send you—without cost or obligation—an interesting 32-page booklet, describing my treatment in detail.

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— A. W. B.

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— T. C.

"Ten years ago my hair started falling. I used hair tonics constantly, but four years ago I displayed a perfect full moon. I tried everything — but without results. Today, however, thanks to your treatment, I am pleased to inform you that I have quite a new crop of hair one inch long. My friends are astonished at the result."
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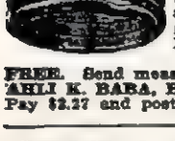

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THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN LILY

(Continued from page 90)

"Stay where you are," he commanded, "or I will shoot you with as little compunction as I would a pair of snakes! Dale," he went on, coolly, "the telephone is by your hand; if you will be good enough to ring up Scotland Yard and mention my name to Colonel Fairbody, the Assistant Commissioner, I have no doubt that he will send somebody round to take charge of these people."

Only Mademoiselle Nadia's quick breathing broke the silence until Dale's voice, speaking into the instrument, rang out sharply:

"Get me Scotland Yard, please—*quickly.*"

In the November WEIRD TALES *you will find another story by Francis D. Grierson, called "The Iron Room"—an unusual story.*

AN ADVENTURE IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION

(Continued from page 70)

becomes a four-dimensional creature like the Jupiterians, only different."

"Nom de mademoiselle!" I commented.

"Say something sensible," he reprimanded me.

"For the love of Einstein, how do you know all these things about the Jupiterians?" I asked, a sudden suspicion flashing across what I am pleased to call my mind.

"Ah, Einstein, yes," exclaimed Nutt, greatly pleased. "My mother's father's name was Einstein."

"Then you are related to—"

"No, I am not related," he interrupted, "but my mother's father is."

"A sort of fourth-dimensional relationship, I suppose," I remarked sarcastically.

At that moment the air became vibrant with an invisible sound. The Jupiterians came rolling from all directions, as if they had suddenly heard the dinner bell. They bounded through the Jupiterian steel of the globe, and immediately shrank in size from three feet to one inch.

"The Jupiterian assembly call just blew," explained the professor. "Notice how the passengers draw into themselves. Six hundred thousand are now packed into that globe. Our elevated railroads miss a great opportunity by not having four-dimensional creatures to deal with."

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"They pack us in just as tight," I ventured to remark.

The globe had begun to shoot into the air, when there came from behind me a high-pitched wail of distress, a shriller and higher sound than had ever before been heard by human ears, so the professor assured me. The chief Jupiterian had been left behind. He it was who had passed into the whisky bottle. Not content with getting the lion's share of the contents, he had surrounded the bottle, in his pleasant four-dimensional way, and now he could not get rid of it.

"Why doesn't he turn inside out again, and drop the bottle?" I asked, watching the Jupiterian with interest.

"Because your whisky has paralyzed him," answered the professor. "He is quite helpless."

I looked at the globe, which had alighted again. Each Jupiterian suddenly resumed his full size, in a brave attempt to bound to the assistance of his chief. But the creatures could no longer pass through the four-dimensional metal of which the globe was composed. So thick a layer of Chicago dust had settled upon it, that to all intents and purposes it had become three-dimensional. The sudden impact of six hundred thousand bodies caused it to burst, with a roar as of a hundred peals of thunder exploding simultaneously. The air was filled with dead and dying Jupiterians. A dark cloud settled over the landscape, composed of the flying dust shaken from the Jupiterian globe by the explosion. Long streamers of electric fire shot from the fragments of the airship, and seemed to curve in upon themselves. Everything ran in curves—the darkness, the cloud, the sounds, the shafts of light—as if bent in by the force of gravity.

I put up my hands and fought the cloud that was settling down upon me. I seemed to be covered with falling feathers, when the cloud began to lift. I found myself in my own parlor. The air was full of flying leaves, which I was madly tearing from a book and throwing toward the ceiling. The book was a treatise on the Einstein theory of space, which I had borrowed from a friend that afternoon. I had read nearly a page in it before I fell asleep.

Only twelve men in the whole world understand the Einstein theory, it is said. If I had read the book, I would have been the thirteenth, and that would be unlucky. So it is just as well that it is destroyed. But what excuse am I to give my friend for tearing up his book?

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AFTER THE STORM

(Continued from page 77)

tremble on her bosom. Tierney was not sitting beside her. He was on his knees with his head close to the pillow. And if ever a man looked as if he had found a divinity, that man was Bennett Tierney.

A sudden wild elation possessed me. Bennett would probably keep Ravensnest. Whether he did or not, there would be no South American ranch for us. And Edith Noland, bless her! the only girl I'd ever wanted would—

With an effort I wrenched myself back to the present and the nurse lighted me to the door I paused to ask a question, "Might it not be too much for Mrs. Tierney in her weakened condition to find her husband there when she awakes?"

The nurse smiled a trifle tremulously. "Happiness does not kill," she said softly.

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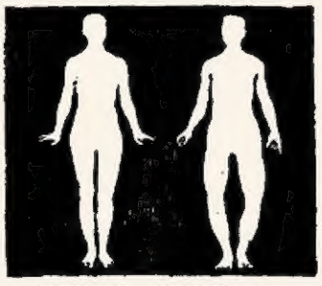

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Beware Pyorrhea

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Do not think that you are immune—that you are relieved from worry because your teeth are perfectly sound and free from decay. Dentists' records show that more well-kept, perfect teeth, sound in every way, are lost from the ravages of painless Pyorrhea than from decay and all other causes combined. Pyorrhea seldom hurts until so far advanced that the gums ulcerate, the teeth become loose and fall out, or have to be extracted. Do not take chances of losing your teeth when you can now so easily and quickly check the ravages of dangerous PYORRHEA.

Soft, Bleeding, Receding Gums—Nature's First Warning of Pyorrhea

To save your teeth look at the gums. Your gums should be healthy, pink, firm and hard. If your gums bleed when you wash your teeth—if they are spongy and are pulling away from the teeth—if your gums are sore when apparently perfectly sound, beware of PYORRHEA. Millions of good people have this disease and do not know it. Soft, bleeding, receding gums mean Pyorrhea, which destroys the bone that holds the teeth in place. The teeth loosen and fall out, or must be extracted because their support is gone.

To Keep Your Teeth You Must Keep Healthy Gums

Pyorrhea is Dangerous to Your Health

Your family doctor will tell you that Pyorrhea is often responsible for many diseases, such as Rheumatism, Neuritis, Kidney Trouble, etc. These germs enter your whole system and undermine your health. Doctors warn that nearly all germs enter the body through the mouth or nose. If your gums are healthy and tight to the teeth, there can be no infection and germs cannot penetrate into the system.

Healthy Teeth

Note how the bone tissue extends up around each tooth root. Compare with next radiograph, where Pyorrhea has destroyed this bone.

Pyorrhea

Two teeth have dropped out. Bony support should extend up to the dotted line. The remaining teeth are already doomed.

X-RAY Tells Story

Thousands of Mouths Like This Are Seen by Dentists Every Day

At the first sign of unhealthy gums, consult your dentist and start, morning and night, the AMOSOL treatment for PYORRHEA. Used regularly it will prevent PYORRHEA and stop its progress. Your beautiful, natural pearly teeth cannot be perfectly replaced. False teeth always look false.

Strong's AMOSOL For Pyorrhea

Read What People Say Who Have Benefited

COULD HARDLY EAT—HAD NEURALGIA

I am very much pleased with the results of my first bottle of AMOSOL and I am sending this customer's order back for two more bottles. Before using AMOSOL my gums were so sore I could hardly eat, also had Neuralgia all the time. Thought I would have to have every tooth out, but received AMOSOL just in time, and now I can eat everything and drink all the cold water I want with comfort. I believe I was getting Pyorrhea.

I am all out of AMOSOL. Hope to receive the two bottles at once and safely, as I believe two more bottles will cure me.

Mrs. Florence N. Danks, Camden, N. J.

GUMS HAVE STOPPED BLEEDING

When I began using AMOSOL my gums were so sore I could not use a brush and bled almost constantly and nearly all my teeth were loose. Now they have stopped bleeding and I can use a brush as well as ever. It is a grand medicine.

Mrs. E. P. Madox, Schroeder, Texas.

AMOSOL—MIRACULOUS

Your AMOSOL for Pyorrhea seems to be miraculous. My gums would bleed every time I brushed my teeth and were very spongy and sore. Since I used your treatment, all seems to be well again. It also did away with the unpleasant odor in my mouth. I haven't even used a whole bottle yet.

Hope you get many more orders from people who have this trouble. I remain as ever,

Your AMOSOL user,
Margaret Sim, Cleveland, Ohio.

CONVINCED CAN BE CURED

Please send the enclosed order Parcel Post C. O. D. to me at Rochelle, Georgia, P. O. Box No. 102. Let the order come at once; your trial sample of AMOSOL has convinced me that Pyorrhea can be cured. I want the goods at once.

H. S. Hodges, Rochelle, Ga.

AGE 22—HAD PYORRHEA

I received the sample of AMOSOL some time ago and sure appreciate it. Please don't think I do not because I haven't acknowledged it before. Words can't explain what I think of AMOSOL just from using the sample.

I am only 22 years old and have real pretty teeth, but my gums got sore and got loose in front. I was so worried, for you know how a young girl would hate to lose her teeth, but since I used the sample you sent me they got tight and my gums do not feel sore at all, only now and then.

I have already given people your address. Please send me a $2.00 bottle, at the earliest date possible. I think it will cure what I think is one of the worst diseases in the world—well it sure is the duty of everyone that uses it to tell others.

Edna Mooney, East St. Louis, Ill.

ENTIRELY HEALED MOUTH

Enclosed Please find money order, for which send me another bottle of AMOSOL. I cannot afford to do without it. It is the most wonderful remedy I ever knew of. It has entirely healed my mouth. My gums are so firm and breath so sweet and fresh. I know there can never be a remedy made to beat it in all the world. Thank you kindly for sending me sample, also large bottle.

Mrs. Charles Whaley, Princeton, W. Va.

GUMS LOOSE—NOW FAST

I want to thank you for the free sample of AMOSOL and also tell you what it did for me on my three front lower teeth. My gums were loose and I could push them down with my tongue, but after using the sample you sent they are now fast to my teeth and I cannot push them away with a toothpick.

I will praise AMOSOL to all who have Pyorrhea. Hoping you have all success with your wonderful new discovery, I am,

Velva Sleeth, Brooklyn, Indiana.

AMOSOL A BLESSING

I am writing you to tell you of the wonderful good that your AMOSOL has done for me. I received sample you sent me. My teeth were in very bad shape. They were sore and loose; my gums were sore and bleeding if touched. I used the sample one time, and I saw it was so good I ordered a large bottle, and now I can say it sure has almost cured me. I feel better in every way. I don't want to be without it in the house.

Mrs. Rosa Forest, Littlefield, Texas.

UPPER TEETH GONE

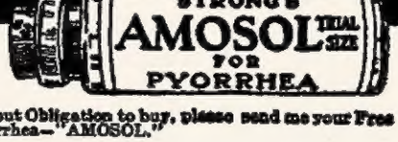
No doubt you are waiting to hear from me about my case of Pyorrhea. I certainly had a bad one. The dentist deprived me of all my upper teeth and said the same must be done with the lower ones. But I think he will get fooled, for since I started to use that splendid remedy, AMOSOL, of yours, am certainly doing more than I expected. Will do all in my power to urge other sufferers to try your wonderful remedy, which I certainly highly recommend.

August Jaclin, Rice Lake, Wis.

A Trial Will Amaze You

The results from a trial of AMOSOL are quick and convincing. Your gums will improve. You can see the results. A trial costs you absolutely nothing. You are under no obligation whatever. We want you to be convinced that AMOSOL will quickly rid you of dangerous Pyorrhea and save your teeth before it is too late. Simply fill in your name and address on coupon, cut out and mail today for a free trial treatment.

FREE RUSH THIS COUPON



Strong's Laboratories,
Dept. 220,
2109 Grand Avenue,
Kansas City, Mo.

Gentlemen:—Without Obligation to buy, please send me your Free Trial Treatment for Pyorrhea—"AMOSOL."

Name .....

Address ..... Town .....

Druggist's Name ..... State .....

"Blake is the Man!"

"I told Hartley he was a 'comer'—and this confirms my judgment! Listen to this letter:—

Dear Sir:

You will no doubt be glad to know that James H. Blake, one of your employees of whose excellent work as a student we have been advising you each month, has completed his course and has been granted a diploma.

International Correspondence Schools

"That settles the manager question. The man who cares enough about his future to invest some of his spare time in *training* is the kind we want in this firm's responsible positions.

"That $5,000 salary will mean a lot to Blake and his family. But he'll *earn* it—and make good use of it. I'll send for him now! It's a pleasure to promote a man who *deserves* it."

IN offices, shops, stores, mines, mills and on railroads, I. C. S. trained men are stepping up to bigger jobs, right over the heads of those whose only qualification is long service.

There is a job ahead of *you* that some man is going to be picked for. And your boss can't take chances. He is going to choose a *trained* man. Why don't you put yourself in line for that promotion?

You can do it without losing a minute from work and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it no matter where you live, how small your means, or how limited your previous education. Yes, you can!

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. in your own home will bring you bigger money, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means. Don't let another single priceless hour of spare-time go to waste! Without cost or obligation of any kind, let us prove that we can help *you*. Just mark and mail this coupon. *Do it right now!*

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2224-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Architect
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Blue Print Reading
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Metallurgy	☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Radio	☐ Mathematics

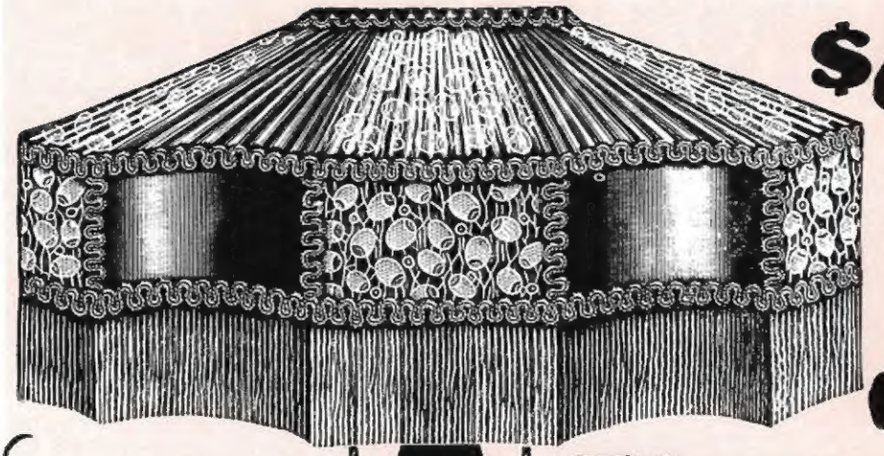
Name.....

Street Address..... 8-3-23

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada



$1.00 Down

Brings This

Floor Lamp With 5th Ave. Silk Shade

Here is something you have always wanted—a beautiful floor lamp with handsome and elegant Fifth Avenue silk shade—to add an extra tone of elegance and luxury to your home. On this generous offer you can see just how this floor lamp and silk shade will look in your home, without risking anything. Send only $1.00 with the coupon below, and we will send it complete to your home on approval, equipped for use with either gas or electricity. We take all the risk.

30 Days Trial

When the lamp outfit comes, use it freely for 30 days. See how beautifully the colorings of the handsome silk shade blend and harmonize with everything in the home. How *useful* it is, too—so handy for reading, can be moved around with ease to furnish a beautiful light and rich warmth and coziness to any room in the house. If after 30 days trial you decide not to keep the lamp, just return it at our expense and we will refund your $1.00 deposit, plus any freight or express you paid. You cannot lose a single penny.

$2.00 a Month

If you discover that this lamp is a tremendous bargain at the price we ask and you decide to keep it, send only $2.00 a month until you have paid the total bargain price of $19.85. Yes, only $19.85 for this luxurious lamp and silk shade complete. Compare this value with anything you could buy locally at anywhere near the same price—*even for spot cash!* Straus & Schram gives you this bargain price and almost a year to pay. We trust honest people anywhere in U. S. No discount for cash; nothing extra for credit. *No C. O. D.*

Price Slashed!

Decide now to **see** this beautiful floor lamp and silk shade in your home on approval on this price smashing offer. Think how the nickels and dimes slip away for useless things; save them for something **worth while** that will give satisfaction for years. Send coupon with only $1.00 now! Satisfaction guaranteed.

Send Coupon NOW!

STRAUS & SCHRAM, Dept. 3937 Chicago, Ill.

Gas or Electric

The Lamp—

Comes equipped for choice of gas or electricity. Has 2-light Benjamin socket for electricity only, with 8-foot silk cord ready for use; or comes with 6-foot rubber hose, burner, mantle and chimney for gas.

Mahogany Finish

Standard is 60 in. high, 3 in. in diameter. Highly polished French mahogany finish.

The Shade—

Made in Fifth Avenue design, 24 in. in diameter, of delft blue silk, shirred top, alternating plain and fancy art silk panels. Twelve panels in all, tinsel braid border, with four inch Chenille fringe. American beauty shirred lining. The harmonious color scheme gives effect of red light shining through a blue haze—a rich warm light. Shipping weight, 27 pounds.

Marshall Silky Fringe Pull-Cords

Also pair of Marshall silky fringe cords with 3½ in. silky fringed tassels, giving an added luxurious effect.

For gas use, order by No. G6332NA.

For electricity, order by No. G6333NA.

Send only $1 with the coupon, $2 monthly. Total Bargain Price for lamp and shade, $19.85.

Free Bargain Catalog

Shows thousands of bargains in home furnishings: furniture, jewelry, rugs, curtains, phonographs, stoves, dishes, aluminum ware, etc. All sold on easy terms. Catalog sent free, with or without order. See the coupon.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

STRAUS & SCHRAM Dept. 3937 CHICAGO

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised Floor Lamp and Silk Shade as checked below. I am to have 30 days free trial. If I keep the lamp, I will send $2.00 a month. If not satisfied, I am to return the lamp and shade within 30 days and you are to refund my $1.00 plus any transportation charges I paid.

☐ *Gas* Floor Lamp No. G 6332NA, $19.85.
☐ *Electric* Floor Lamp No. G 6333NA, $19.85

Name.....

Street, R. F. D. or Box No......

Shipping Point.....

Post Office..... *State*.....

If you want ONLY our free catalog of home furnishings, mark X here ☐